

# Indian Classical Dance

Kapila Vatsyayan












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# INDIAN CLASSICAL DANCE

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First edition, 1974 (Pausa, 1896)  
First Reprint, November 1992 (Kartika 1914)  
Second Reprint 1997 (Saka 1919)

©  
ISBN : 81-230-0589-X

PRICE

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PATIALA HOUSE, NEW DELHI-110 001

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Printed at Nutech Photolithographers, New Delhi



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## Preface

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It is always gratifying for an author to know that a second edition of his book is needed or expected. In this case I am doubly gratified because between the writing and the publication of the first edition and today, many valuable and important monographs have appeared on Indian Classical Dance. In 1971, despite the valuable work of the early writers—Coomaraswamy, Bharata Iyer, La Meri and the popular books of G. Banerjee, hardly anything was available for the general reader.

My attempt in the first edition was to introduce the classical or, what I have called, neo-classical dance forms, in a lucid manner for the 'enlightened reader'. Understandably, no attempt was made to go into the complex evolution of the dance forms in relation to the Indian aesthetic theory and the other arts, especially, those of architecture, sculpture and music. As I have stated in the introduction to the first edition, the attempt was to present, as clearly as possible, the literary, sculptural and epigraphic evidence of the region which form the basis of identifying the history of evolution, but, would not, necessarily, be history itself. Also, the focus was on technique, the nature of movement, articulation, shape, form, effort, energy rather than the repertoire with its literary or poetic content.

Over these two decades much has happened in the fields of both dance as performance as also classical dance as an ingredient of contemporary theatre. Alongside many monographs have appeared on specific dance styles. My own book has been followed by several others where an attempt has been made to probe deeper into the primary archaeological and literary sources as also the history of the relationship of dance and painting and dance as a most important and indispensable limb of traditional Indian theatre.

Logically, a second edition may have taken all these developments into account because the discovery of new manuscripts, of both *sastras* and *kavya* in Sanskrit and other languages as also hitherto unknown examples of mural paintings and a vast number of miniatures provide material for a better reconstruction of the history of Indian dance and its regional flowerings. Also, the dance performance itself has undergone a change on account of change of context, nature of audience, duration of performance



and the training and intellectual equipment of the dancer. Cumulatively, this has brought about major transformations in technique, specially, in the aspect of the delivery of movement.

I have not attempted to take cognizance of all these changes, I would say, almost transformations. The new neo-classical forms may today be called contemporary Indian dance with classical inspiration.

The first edition has been modified only to the extent of refinement of certain technical aspects of the styles as such. I hope that this edition will continue to interest the readers as a first introduction to the principal dance styles.

As I have had occasion to mention, here and elsewhere, the absence of a Chapter on *Kuchipudi* will be missed and its absence in the first edition has been commented upon. I was requested by many to add a Chapter. I did not do so because I believe in the dictum of Bharata that "the *Sastra* of *Natya* is the *Prayoga Sastra*". As such, I believe that no critic or writer of dance should attempt to write on movement without having gone through the experience of the movement in his or her own body. I have not been trained in Kuchipudi. I hope others will fill this gap.

I have sat at the feet of traditional masters in most of the styles I have spoken about. What I write is not from books, but, from the living experience of the arts in actual practice. I once again express my deep indebtedness to them all.

I would like to thank the Publications Division, specially Dr. Bhagyalakshmi, and her colleagues for the pains they have taken in the production of the second edition.

DR. (MRS.) KAPILA VATSYAYAN



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## Preface to the First Edition

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The present study of the major forms of classical dances was written some years ago and it should have seen the light of day then. This was not possible for a variety of reasons, some beyond the power of the author.

This introductory remark would not be essential for a publication which treats classical forms with established antiquity even if uncertain history. However, it is in the nature of the classical forms of Indian dancing that while they remain ancient and unchangeable on one level, they continue to grow or decline and certainly modify and assimilate new elements everyday. In this sense it would be more accurate to prefix the adjective classical with the word contemporary. Even between the writing and the publication of the book the forms have undergone some changes and modifications both in technique and repertoire. Besides, many new aspects of technique have come to light in respect of some styles such as Orissi. A full system of exercises of cadences of movements analogous to the *adavus* is now known and practised by all schools and sub-schools of the dance styles. The *arasa* follow the rigorous pattern both in body manipulation and tala variety like the *adavus* of Bharatanatyam. Details of these and similar aspects could not be comprehensively dealt with in this monograph at the time of writing.

A more important development has taken place by the rediscovery of a class of composition in the performing arts of India, which has been loosely termed as the 'Traditional dance-drama forms'. Amongst these genre are the three types of Chhau, the Mayurbhanj Chhau, the Seraikela Chhau and the Purulia Chhau. Other dance-drama forms, such as Kuchipudi and Yakshagana have acquired a different character. Even so the narrative continues to be primary and each actor is the *dramatis personae* as distinct from the narrator/actor of Bharatanatyam, Orissi, Kathak. There is a sizeable body of *nritya* technique (abstract dance) which may have justified the inclusion of these forms in a work on classical dance traditions. In form while they resemble Kathakali, they are a class apart, either by the exclusion of the *vachika* in singing, (i.e. in the Chhau forms only instrumental music is used) or by the use of *vachika* also by the dancers as in Kuchipudi/Yakshagana etc. Also the scope for *ekaharya* variety of *abhinaya* by the dancer is limited. The absence of *vachika* in some forms results in their classicity being marginal such as the Chhau forms and the use of the *vachika* by



the actor rather than the musician as in Kuchipudi or Yakshagana makes them more drama than dance. In recent years in Kuchipudi alone a clearly identifiable repertoire of solo/duet dance has emerged. In spite of this, the individual numbers have not yet reached a stage of art dance where a full-fledged body of technique and kinetics can be discussed without reference to the basic narrative and dramatic theme.

It is on account of these reasons that these forms vital and important in themselves demand an independent study rather than as part of a book on contemporary classical dances. In this context it would be pertinent to mention that these forms also provide the diffused areas in the Indian performing arts which distinguish folk from classical on the one hand, and dance from drama proper on the other. They have served as significant bridges of communication between different forms and levels of performance. No comprehensive study of dance traditions of India would be possible also without an awareness of the rich folk/village traditions of the performing arts. They have continually provided vitality and sustenance to more sophisticated forms: whenever sophisticated forms reached a point of baroque ornateness verging on decadence it has been the full-throated primordial folk traditions which have helped resurrection and thus survival. A creative genius then reconstructs the form by an ingenuous use of folk traditions on the one hand and the use of sophisticated creative poetry on the other. The combination of contextual *sahitya* and elements of dance which could be culled out of fragments of earlier classical traditions which lingered in folk forms gave rise to a new classicity. A study of the history of any of the contemporary styles bears testimony to the recurrence of this phenomena in Indian dance history.

The present study has endeavoured to point out the various sources which have been responsible for the emergence of a full-fledged classical style.

This approach to dance styles (which have been considered as unimitable and unchangeable), is not without its hazards; it is nonetheless challenging for it may lead to some fresh insight into the cultural history and milieu, technique and repertoire of each of these styles.

The organisational pattern of the book is, I believe, clear. It treats of the particular styles in relation to literary, sculptural, epigraphical evidence of the region and analysis of technique mainly from the point of view of articulation and methodology of movement. While the repertoire has been included, this has not been given emphasis, since this aspect is in a process of continual change and development. Also, the author has tried to stay clear of myth and legend which has befogged the treatment of Indian classical dance.

An attempt has also been made to correlate the *sastric* and the oral traditions preserved in the *sampradayas* (the sub-schools of oral traditions within dance



styles). The terminology thus does not restrict itself either to that of the *sastras* or to that of common parlance in teaching in the oral tradition.

A more thorough study of the subtle differences between different *sampradayas*, *gharanas*, would be necessary for a minute analysis of all aspects of the technique of each of the dance styles. Each *sampradaya* has developed specific aspects and it is only when all these are gathered together that a near total picture of what the dance style may have been can emerge. This, too, is not within the scope of the present study; our aim is to give a broad picture of each dance styles from the point of view of its characteristic movements and nature of stylization, rather the intricate variations within a dance style.

No work, far less a work of this kind (which covers the history and technique of distinct, fully developed, highly stylised forms of dance), can be executed without the guidance, help and cooperation of scholars, dance *gurus* and friends. The author has been fortunate in a direct experience of training in four out of five styles included. Insights into technique were provided by traditional masters. Amongst the many to whom I am indebted, the foremost are the late Achchan Maharaj, my revered guru of Kathak, and the late Ojha Amobi Singh, my guide, in Manipuri and the late Sri Mahabir Singh. To Smt. Balasaraswati I am indebted for many stimulating discussions on *adavus*, on different aspects of *nritya* and *abhinaya*. A deep insight into the logic of kinetics cannot be achieved without a direct experience: this was provided by Smt. Lalitha Sastri, in the field of Bharatanatyam and Guru Surendranath Jena in Orissi. A professional dancer cannot hope to master more than one style in a life time, but an academic understanding of each of these is possible although difficult. This the author has endeavoured to do, through continued rigorous training and practice along with a study of texts, manuals and history related to these styles. A series of fortuitous circumstances, such as visits to Kerala Kalamandalam and a continued association with Sri Ramankutty has helped to see many subtle aspects of Kathakali. Discussions with the late Meenakshisundaram Pillai and opportunities to observe his training methods and of the late Bharatanarayana Swami have been of invaluable help. To all these and many others, including my teachers of modern Dance, Sri Devendra Shankar in India and Dr. Juana-de Laban, I am indebted. If some of the richness of these styles along with their distinctive movement quality can be communicated to readers I shall be gratified, more so because verbalising in an essentially nonverbal medium presents insurmountable difficulties. The endeavour throughout has been to present the artistic history, technique and repertoire of these styles in a clear meaningful organisational pattern rather than to load the work with a plethora of information and detail found in textual manuals and oral traditions. It is the earnest hope of the author that even this short and general treatment will enable audiences to understand the formal aspects of Indian dance styles more clearly and help students of dance to bring a more self-conscious analytical approach to the learning of movement.



Thanks are due to many many others, friends, associates, dancers, who have generously provided help and assistance in a variety of ways. While it would not be possible to mention all of them, I would particularly like to thank Dr. V. Raghavan, Smt. Balasaraswati, Smt Shanta Rao, Smt Mrinalini Sarabhai, Shri Ramankutty, Shri Padmanabhan, Shri Lachchu Maharaj and Shri Birju Maharaj, Guru Amobi Singh, Smt. Nayana Jhaveri, Shri Prabhat Ganguli, Smt Gul Bardhan, Shri Mohan Khokar and Shri S. H. Vatsyayan. Many of them have also provided photographs which I gratefully acknowledge. Thanks are also due to the Photo Division of Min. of I & B., Sangeet Natak Akademi, Archaeological Survey of India and other organisations for other photographs.

In the preparation of the manuscript, two friends, Carol Nathan and Renee Renouf, were of invaluable assistance. I am grateful to them. .

K.V.



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# HISTORY OF DANCE

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The history of Indian classical dance is no longer a matter of conjecture; it is a fact and reality which pervades all parts of India and extends from the earliest levels of civilisation to the present day. This mass and volume of material is so extensive that it has been impossible for scholars to bring it together in one single totality. Besides, the art has permeated all others ranging from poetry and literature to architecture, sculpture and painting and naturally music and theatre. The antiquity, vastness and the multiple facets of the art make it impossible to make a total conclusive statement. Nevertheless, through the single distinctive traditions in different parts of India, we can have a glimpse of the rich, strong and vibrant traditions of the art from the earliest times.

India's prehistory and proto-history also provide sufficient evidence of this fact. For example, there is the dancing girl from Mohenjodaro, and the broken torso of the Harappan period suggestive of a dance pose. There are beautiful metaphors and similes in the *Vedas* based on the art of dance. The most beautiful of these are the description of *Ushas*, the Dawn. Epithets of dance have been used for the Gods: Indra, Marut, the Asvins, and the *Apsaras*, all have been spoken of as well-initiated in the Art. Dance, as a profession and as a social activity, has been associated with all significant moments of the life cycle. In the epics and *puranas*, the princes are taught the art of dancing; both Rama and Arjuna were adept in it and, of course, Krishna is the Supreme Dancer. Only a flourishing tradition of performance could have enabled the writer of the *Natyasastra*, to codify the theatrical art in his monumental work.

Roughly speaking, we can divide the history of dance into three or four periods. The first is prehistoric and proto-historic. This period comprises the evidence found in the cave paintings, engravings, the evidence of Mohenjodaro and the Harappan civilization and the literary evidence which can be had from the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, the *Brahmanas* and the epics. The second period may be considered from the second century B.C. to the ninth century A.D. This includes the monuments of the Buddhist stupas such as those of Bharhut, Sanchi, Bhaja, Amravati, Nagarjunakonda, and the caves of Ellora and the temples in different parts of India from Kashmir to Orissa, specially the early Gupta temples and those of Bhuvaneswara. The third period may be considered

History of dance split  
into 3-4 periods.



from the tenth or eleventh to the eighteenth century A.D. This includes early medieval and late medieval monuments. While there are no literary records of the prehistoric period, in the later half of the first period (Vedic India) and in the second period, Sanskrit exercised outstanding influence on the intellectual and artistic life of the people and its rich literature manifested the all-round development of the arts in the country. This may be considered as a period of unity along with the emergence of some regional styles. In the third period, there was a marked development of regional architectural, sculptural, pictorial, music and dance styles along with the development of regional literature. One might even add to this a fourth period which may be considered as the period from the late eighteenth or the nineteenth century to contemporary India. This was a period of great political turmoil and at the same time a period in which the arts were resurrected from fragments to make a new artistic whole.

It was in the second period that there was the first articulation of a self-conscious understanding of this art. Had it not been so widely prevalent and popular, it is inconceivable that a monumental treatise like the *Natyasastra* could be compiled. In the very nature of things, the formulas, the *sastras* tradition followed the practice and not preceded it. They or their masters sought to depict some of the poses and movements codified in the *Natyasastra* especially those identified as the *sthanas* and *chari* in the *Natyasastra*. The motifs in the sculptural tradition were those of the tree and woman, the Yaksha and the Yakshini and many others; all these finally crystalised into the dance of Siva and that of Krishna. During this second period, we find that there was an effort at stylisation although none of the monuments and the sculptural relief show that they had arrived at a stereotyped convention merely to be followed or repeated. In Bharhut, Sanchi, Mathura and elsewhere, there are innumerable Yakshas and Yakshinis who stand against tree or pillar, hold branches or birds, stand on dwarfs or animal vehicles i.e. the *vahanas*. Each of these men and women are seen in a dance pose. Along side are dance scenes with full orchestra. There are many such scenes in the reliefs of Bharhut, Sanchi, Amravati, Nagarjunakonda, Ellora, Pavaviya in Gwalior and other Gupta sites. This is also the period of the emergence of the sculptural figures of gods and goddesses especially Shiva, Durga, Saraswati and Ganesha; each has a dance aspect popularly called the *nrittamurti*. From this sculptural evidence of the second period, we realise that the dance must have been central to the culture for the sculptor to have been inspired to arrest it in stone repeatedly.

Alongside is the evidence of dance in mural paintings ranging from the famous dance scene of Bagh caves to others in Ajanta, Ellora, Sitanavasal and Panamalai. This impression of the pervasive popularity of the dance motif is further reinforced by the evidence available in Sanskrit literature of the classical period especially the *Kavya* and the *Nataka*. In the epics *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, many dance performances are prescribed. In the works of the poets Bhasa, Kalidasa, Bharavi and others, until the time of Harsha, we encounter many precise descriptions of dancers and dance recitals. From all this, one can gather that the poet and the dramatist were equally well-versed in



the technical intricacies of dance. They appreciated the aesthetic beauty and drew upon this art to structure their poetic or dramatic edifice. As is now recognised, none of the plays of Kalidasa or his successors had been conceived of a drama dependent on the spoken word alone. The communication systems employed by the writer take into account not only the verbal communication but also communication through gestures, costumes, decor and above all, the inner states of being which are reflected in involuntary expressions. This tradition of looking at drama not only as the written or the spoken word, but as a configuration of different types of communication techniques was established in India many centuries prior to the writing of the plays of Bhasa or Kalidasa. This is evident from the codification of these communication techniques in the first treatise on dramaturgy i.e. the *Natyasastra*. Creative writers and poets were perhaps keenly sensitive to the relationship of the word and the gesture, the gesture and the design, and the system of correspondence, signs and symbols which was prescribed in Brahminical rituals. In course of time, this was taken over by the arts and used as a systematised methodology in the writing of drama to be presented on the stage. Kalidasa and his successors specially Bhavabhuti and Harsha all follow these techniques in writing their dramas. The presentation of Sanskrit plays on the stage is possible only if it is taken into account that movement constitutes an integral part of the communication methodologies. The perfect balance between the verbal called the *vachika*, the kinetic or gesture called the *angika*, costume and decor called the *aharika* and the involuntary state called the *satvika* make a harmonious whole. Later, some dramatists preferred to use only the verbal as the chief instrument of communication. Others depended more on music and song. Yet others relied on movement and there was a flowering out in different branches or in different directions dependent on the dominant tool of communication. From the Sanskrit *nataka* developed a new genre called the *Uprupakas*. Judging from texts like the *Dasarupakas*, it would appear that a distinct form had emerged. In this there was a predominant role of music—vocal and instrumental and movement. Indeed, the beginnings of this can be traced to the writings of Kalidasa himself. The fourth Act of Kalidasa's play *Vikramorvashi* cannot be presented on the stage unless movement is considered integral to the verbal. The tradition continues in the plays of Bhavabhuti, Harsha and culminates in the work of Rajasekhara. It is evident that by the time of the writing of the play *Karpuramanjari*, the dramatic form chiefly utilising the verbal had given place to the musical play. Many examples of this could be cited from the dramatic works of the tenth century A. D. *Karpuramanjari* has been called a *Shataka*, a theatrical form mentioned in the inscriptions of Bharhut., but of which not many literary examples seem to have survived although they may still be available in manuscripts. From this evidence, it is clear that the musical play, was an important genre in the Sanskrit tradition. However, its full and vigorous flowering took place only in the early and the late medieval period. This is further supported by references to such dramatic musical recitals in the chronicle works also belonging to the ninth century A.D. and continuing until the eleventh and twelfth century.



Apart from the evidence which can be gathered from archaeological remains, sculptural reliefs, mural painting, extant works of Sanskrit literature and chronicle sources, there is the rich source of textual material normally called the manuals or treatises. It would appear that soon after the writing of the *Natyasastra*, works on aesthetic concerned themselves mainly with discussion on the nature of the aesthetic experience and the literary form. By about the sixth century A.D., two distinct types of texts appear, the first were purely theoretical works which discussed the nature of aesthetic experience, the artistic work and the evocation of an analogous aesthetic experience in the spectator, reader or participator. The second group of treatises concentrate on the techniques of communication. Understandably, therefore, several texts appear each concerning itself with either the word or sound, music, vocal or instrumental, and movement. All the *Puranas*, particularly the early *puranas*, namely the *Agni Purana*, *Vishnudharmottara Purana*, contain valuable sections on poetry, music, dance, painting and drama. Alongside appear the special texts which devote themselves only to either music or dance or poetry. Amongst the most outstanding of these texts in the field of dance is *Abhinaya Darpana* by Nandikeshvara, a text solely devoted to dance. In the ninth and tenth century was also written the commentary on the *Natyasastra* by Abhinavagupta. He comments on all sections of the major fundamental text *Natyasastra* both from the point of view of philosophy as also form and technique of the arts. It is significant that this text written somewhere in Kashmir travelled to all parts of India. The commentary of Abhinavagupta began a new phase of the evolution of different theories of aesthetic and artistic creation.

To this second period (i.e. 2nd to 10th century) also belonged the construction of stupas and temples. The railings and the gates of stupas, the outer and inner walls of the temples present a multitude of life comprehending many aspects of the terrestrial world. Amongst these is the motif of the dancer, the dance recital as also the dancing aspect of god and goddesses. Most important was the self-conscious attempt to arrest in plastic form certain cadence of movement described in the fourth chapter of the *Natyasastra*. These are the phases of movement called the *Karanas*. Although early cave sculpture such as the caves of Aurangabad and Ellora clearly exhibited the sculptor's technical knowledge of the dance, in the Brihadeshvara temple in Tanjore built in the eleventh century A.D., the first self-conscious attempt to present serially these cadences of movement was made. Popularly called the *karanas*, these reliefs by the sculptor attempt to capture either the initial or the intermediary or the final moment of a whole cadence of movement. This attempt at carving, sculpturing relief based on descriptions and performance was repeated in other sites both in South India and in North India. In Tamil Nadu, three other major attempts were made to present the *Karanas*. The temples at Sarangpani, Eastern and Northern Gopuram of Chidambaram and the Gopuram of Tiruvannamalai all belong to the 12th, 13th and 14th century. All depict a series of reliefs with inscriptions of the names of the *karanas*. In North India, an attempt was made in Chittor. In the



*Kirti Stambha* of Chittor, again a series of movements have been carved. Elsewhere also, the sculptor was inspired by the movements of the dance both as an impressionistic recreation and as a technical reconstruction. The Orissan temples of Bhuvanesvara and even earlier the stupas of Ratnagiri tell us of the preoccupation of the sculptor with the image of the dance. Men and women deities, gods and goddesses peep out of inner recesses, stand out in the sunlight on the walls of these temples. Each of these figures, singly and collectively, makes for an overpowering orchestration of movement. The temples of Raja Rani of Parasuramesvara and of Lingraja all reverberate with music and dance. Innumerable figures entwined with trees or pillars, holding birds, standing on animals or dwarfs smiling or more serious, are depicted in panel after panel on the outer walls of these temples. Looked at closely, one is impressed by the fact that the sculptor was not only a keen observer of movement, but was also a self-conscious illustrator of the basic positions i.e. the *sthanas* and the fundamental movements called the *charis* described in the *Natyasastra*. The monuments of Central India especially those of Khajuraho built by the Chandelas, Udyeshwar of the Parmaras belonging to the 11th and 12th centuries also present a wide array of movement patterns from solo standing figures to figures in demipile or *ardhamandali* to groups and finally to the most impressive series of flying figures. The movement of the dance envelops these temples. As in Orissa, here also the dancing figure reaches out to the spectator from the lowermost panels to the highest lintels, from the ground to ceiling. Each is self-contained and yet each is part of the total orchestration of the sculptured figure as if it is a choreography of dance. This orchestration of choreography leaves a staggering impression of the popularity of dance. Innumerable scenes of dance fill the pillars and toranas of stupas, the walls of medieval temples ranging from Rajasthan and Saurashtra to Orissa, from Kashmir to Karnataka and Kerala, and the large Gopurams of South Indian temples, the platforms of the monuments of Vijayanagaram, of Hampi and of the Hazararam temple. All bear testimony to the sculptors' and the painters' innate fascination of movement. These sculptors and painters record in stone and in painting, through line and colour what no chronicle could record in words. None of this would have been possible or could have achieved such a level of excellence had the experience of the dance not been the inner resource. The sculptor and the painter give form and shape to this deep perception of movement. Indeed, even after the tradition of sculpturing reliefs on temple walls and painting on walls and ceilings waned, it continues in miniature paintings. Now the motif of the dance finds another expression, in the varied schools of Indian miniature painting. Some are inspired by Buddhist texts, others by Jaina themes, and yet others by Hindu *Puranic* myth and legend. However, in all these ranging from the illustrations of the *Prajnaparmita* of the Buddhists, the *Kalpasutra* of the Jainas, to, of course, the *Mrigavati*, *Akbarnama*, *Bhagavata Purana* and *Gita Govinda*, there is prolific depiction of dance. Sometimes, there are solos as in the case of *Trishila* dance in the *Kalpasutra*. At other times, there are groups as in the case of the *Dasmaskandha* of the *Bhagavata Purana*. At the



level of technique, occasionally, it is only the painters' expressionistic recreation of dance. At other times, it is a highly technical act of notation as in the case of the marginal figures of the several Jaina *Kalpasūtras*.

This second period and the first half of the third period, is most important for a dance historian. During this period, the temples and the courts maintained a large number of dancers and dance was part of the ritual or the *seva* to the deity. The inscriptions on the temple walls of Brihadeshvara or elsewhere, the chronicles ranging from *Rajatarangani* to those of *Madala Panaji* in Orissa tell us of the tradition of the maintenance of the temple dancers and the care and the thought which was given to support these traditions as part of the temple complex.

The sculpture and the painting inscriptions records are only one source for reconstructing the history of dance during this period. Besides this, there is a body of critical writing and a sizeable volume of creative writing which reveals that the art was not only widely practised and given an important place in society both within the temple and without, but that there was a highly sophisticated critical appreciation of this art at the level of both theory and practice. *Sangitaratnakara*, Sarangadeva's monumental treatise on music had set the new tone of musical practice. It also includes an exhaustive chapter on the dance. This chapter is of vital importance for understanding the traditions of the dance as they were followed and as they developed in different parts of India. By and large, the writer follows the *Natyasastra* and occasionally the *Abhinaya Darpana*. However, he provides significant evidence pointing to the fact that, while the *Natyasastra* tradition was generally accepted, there were departures and modifications. Among the many new concepts, he introduces, is the concept of style (*paddhati*) and the movements. He speaks of basic movements under two categories, viz., the pure (*suddha*) and the regional variants (*desastha*). Once again, he speaks of the purely classical or the academic form under the label of *suddha*, and the regional variants under the head of *desi paddhatis*. While Sarangadeva was not the first to introduce this concept, he was certainly the first to give it an authoritative sanction. Bhoja in his *Sringara-prakasa* and Somesvara in *Manasollasa* had already spoken of these concepts and had accepted regional styles. The recognition of regional styles contributed greatly to the further development of the individual, distinctive, classical styles of the various regions.

From the 13th century onwards, one can find manuals on dance from practically every region of the country. There is the *Nrittaratnavali* of Jaya Senapati from Andhra Pradesh, *Sangitopanishat Sarodhara* by Vachanacharya Sudhakalasa of Gujarat. *Hastamuktavali* of Assam, *Govinda Sangita Lila Vilasa* from Manipur, *Abhinaya Chandrika* of Mahesvara Mahapatra from Orissa, *Sangita Damodara* of Raghunath from Bengal, *Adi Bharatam*, *Bharatarnava* and *Nritta Adhyaya* of the *Sangitamakaranda*, from Tamil Nadu, *Balarama Bharatam* and *Hastalakshana*



*Dipika* from Kerala, the *Nrityaratnakosa* by Kumbhakarana from Rajasthan and the *Sangitamallika* of Mohammad Shah from North India. The list is not complete. In fact, it merely gives examples from the various regions of India.

Even a superficial study of these manuals emphasizes two broad facts; first, that despite regional variations, all schools subscribed to the basic principles of the *Natyasastra* tradition. The dance continued to be divided into *Natya* and *Nritta* on the one hand and into *Tandava* and *Lasya* on the other. The second is that, although they continued to follow these broad principles, many distinctive regional styles evolved and each region ultimately developed a distinctive vocabulary. This second fact led to the formulation of different classical styles in India. The beginning of the contemporary classical styles be it Bharatnatyam, Kathakali, Manipuri, Orissi or Kathak--can be traced back to developments in the medieval period, roughly dating from 1300 A.D. to 1800 A.D. In content and theme, dance was conditioned by the growth of regional literary traditions which in turn were influenced by shifts in religious emphasis. Both the *Gita Govinda* and the *Sangitaratnakara* travelled to all parts of India. While the *Sangitaratnakara* reflects changes in the technique of dance, Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda* reflects the popularity of the theme in all parts of India. Between the 11th and the 12th Century A.D., there appears to be a very sharp turn towards Vishnu and Krishna. Musical plays, for which *Karpuramanjari* had already prepared the ground, were common; they were written in large numbers and were acted in temples and courtyards. Vidyapati wrote a musical play known as the *Goraksha Vijaya* which was widely performed. Practically in all parts of India, *kirtans*, *bhajans*, *padas* and *harikathas* were widely held which provided an immense scope for interpreting the musical word through gestures.

As embodied in the songs of the saint-poets from all over India, the Vaishnavite tradition provided the various styles of dance with an essential unity. Thematically many dance styles revolved round the Krishna's lovestory especially as narrated in the tenth chapter of the *Srimadbhagavata*. In all parts of India, the literary type of musical composition was not merely an accompaniment. The word was important, because it was what was being interpreted through mime. In the abstract portions, different *talas* and different patterns of stylized movement evolved. The particular type of stylized movement gave each style a distinguishing character.

The different styles of classical Indian dance were practised and perfected by creative artistes in different regions even during periods of political upheaval and lack of social patronage. Family traditions, called the *sampradayas*, grew within these styles; the masters were the repositories of an invaluable oral tradition, and as such preserved and nurtured it. They frequently contributed to its growth in spite of the lack of basic education or academic knowledge of unfamiliarity with the Sanskrit language.



The British system of education did not recognise the "arts" as a subject of educational curricula. The generation which went to the schools and colleges, founded by the British in India in the 19th Century, was thus isolated from the art traditions of the country. Temple dancing was forbidden, but the devotees of the art continued to practise it in the seclusion of their homes.

Apparently, the art had died by the 20th century and what could be seen of it was only a diluted, almost degenerated form of what was known as the *nautch* in the North, and the *sadir* in the South. It was like a shadow of bygone reality.

The recent revival of interest in dance, developed as a sign of national pride in the glories of indigenous art and culture, helped the development and popularity of our various dance styles.

The storehouse was so rich and the layer of dust so weak that the sincere artiste had only to dig a little to discover its essential luminosity. During the past five decades, many layers of past artistic glory have been uncovered. The digging continues and each time one delves deeper, a greater treasure is discovered.

The classical dance styles of contemporary India are largely reconstructions of these fragments of antiquity. On one level, they have great antiquity which links them with the past, on another they are contemporary and recent, performed outside the traditional milieu and context, each time recreating the past, but are not the past. Sometimes the content is old, but the form and technique new; at others, new content is infused into an older format. It is a subtle eclectic approach seemingly ancient but in fact an expression of modern sensibility.



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## THEORY AND TECHNIQUE

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As has been mentioned in the previous chapter, there is a rich body of critical writing on the dance both at the level of theory and at the level of technique. Writers on dance and drama were known to Panini as is obvious from the numerous words he used for the actor, the performer, the dancer, the acrobat as also his reference to the *Nata sutras*. Naturally, the most important and fundamental amongst all these theoretical works is the *Natyasastra* composed some time between the second century B.C. and second century A.D., in all probability around the first century A.D. The tradition of writing treatises and theoretical works on aesthetics continued in India till the seventeenth or even the eighteenth century A.D. The technique of dance is described in the numerous treatises beginning with the *Natyasastra* and progressing through those of the medieval works of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Although most of these treatises deal with all aspects of dramaturgy, this discussion restricts itself to those elements of the dance concerned with the basic instrument of expression, viz., the human figure.

No dance text deals with the technique of human movement or kinetic in isolation. From the earliest texts to the latest, the treatises always take into account the fact that movement or dance is one amongst many communication techniques. At the level of both theory as also technique, the approach is holistic. Indian dance synthesizes the techniques of the other arts to evolve an art form which is considered the most significant of all as it represents the unceasing rhythm of the cosmos. It is no mere accident that the culmination of this vision and approach to the art form was the image of Siva dancing. It symbolises cosmic rhythm in its endless movement of involution, evolution and devolution. Also, this image of Siva as a dancer is parallel to the image of the multi-armed Durga and Vishvarupa of Vishnu. On one level, all these represent the principle of unity and multiplicity, the principle of a one body and the many arms, the principle of the still centre and the continuous flux in the periphery.

The theory of Indian dance cannot be understood in isolation without taking into account the world view, the vision and the total commitment to the principle of unity and multiplicity. At the level of technique, this art has to be comprehended as a complex synthesis of the arts of literature, sculpture, painting and music.



The writer of the *Natyasastra* was fully conscious of the all-embracing quality of the art of drama or *natya* (which includes dancing) when he states, at the very beginning of his treatise, that "this art will be enriched by the teachings of every scripture (*sastra*) and will give a review of all arts and crafts." He expresses the same idea when he says that, "there is no wise maxim, no learning, no art or craft, no device, no action that is not found in drama" and again when he asserts, "Hence, I have devised the drama in which meet all the departments of knowledge, different arts and various actions."

"There are no limitations of theme or content of the dance since it depicts the exploits of the gods, asuras and kings as well as of ordinary human beings. Its range extends to the seven divisions of the world (*Sapta dvipa*) and thus, when the entire limitless range of human nature with its joys and sorrows is depicted through gestures etc., it is called drama (*natya*)."

The theory and technique of Indian dancing is an integral part of this conception of the drama and cannot be understood without realizing the full implications of these assertions, which have been so aptly made by Bharata. It is not necessary to go into the details of the historical development of dancing and enter into the controversy of whether dance emerged, as an art-form before the "drama" proper, or the vice versa. It is sufficient to point out here, that, at a very early stage of development, both these arts fused themselves into one and, by the time Bharata wrote his treatise, the dance was very much a part of drama; they had many points of contact, and both were consciously conceived as one.

The *Natyasastra*, thus, is neither a treatise on drama alone, as understood by some, nor a treatise on dance alone as erroneously believed by many devotees of dance. The theory and technique of Indian dance has actually to be picked out and its principles selected with discrimination from the entire technique of drama prescribed by Bharata. While dance does emerge as an independent art once this is done, it nevertheless continues to be a very important part of the many-branched tree of drama. Indeed, such an important one and the essential character of Indian drama is lost if we remove aspects peculiar to dance which the Sanskrit dramatist described as *angikabhinava*.

The principles governing the technique of Indian dance are the same as those which govern the technique of classical drama in India. Most of Indian dramaturgists agree that the conventions of stage presentation are a vital part of the structure of Indian drama. The literary piece can be fully understood only as a configuration of various aspects of stage presentation. The rules which govern this stage presentation are the manifold conventions of the Sanskrit stage.

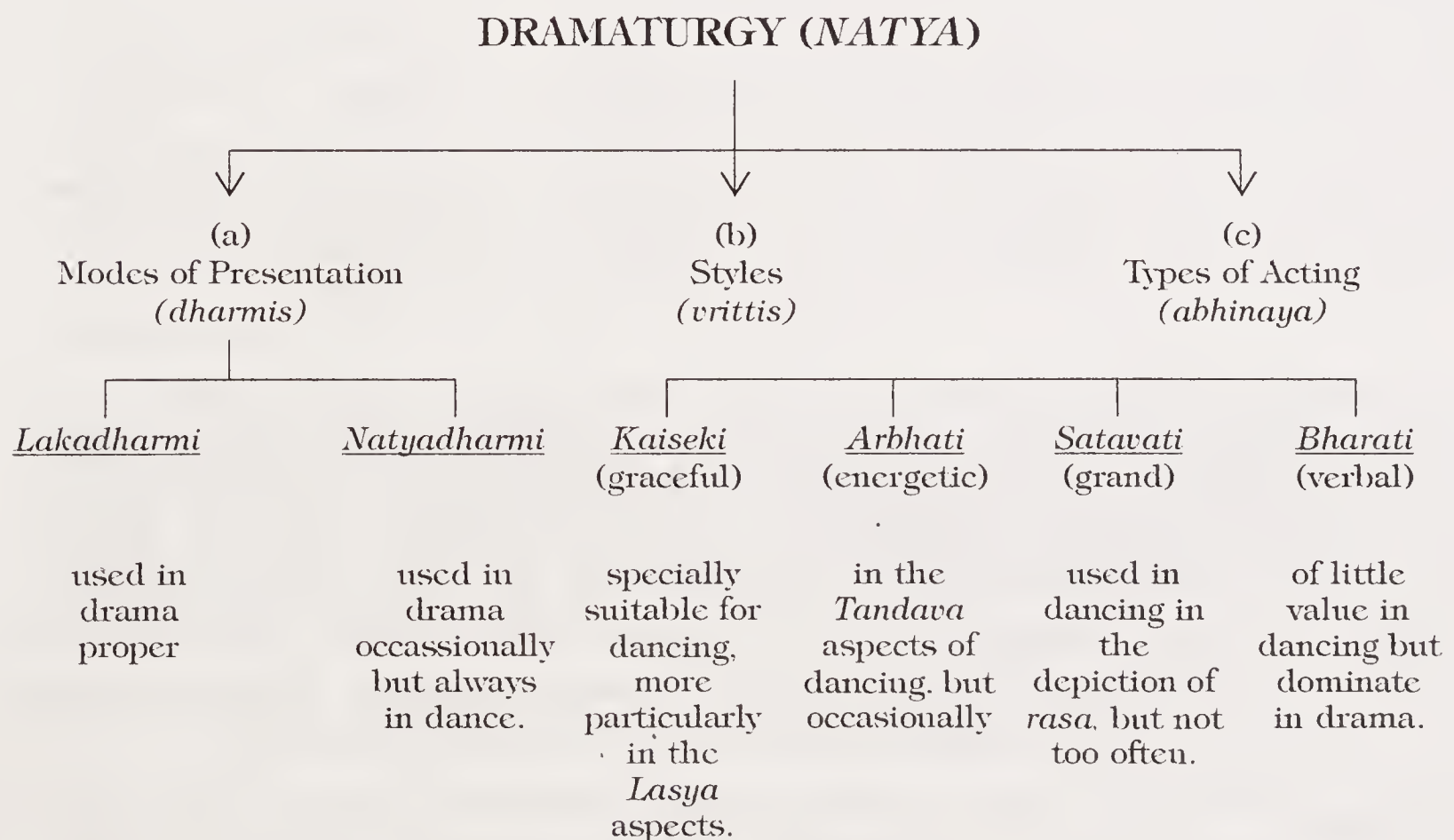
Three broad principles govern the structure of Indian drama and stage presentation. The first is the principle of the modes of presentation, namely, the modes (*dharmis*), stage way or stylized way (*natya*) and natural or the way of the world (*loka*). The second consists of the different types of styles (*vrittis*), namely the graceful (*Kaiseki*), the grand (*Sattavati*), the energetic (*arabhati*) and



the verbal (*bharati*). The third is the full play of the four types of acting (*abhinaya*), namely the gestures (*angika*), vocal (*vachika*), costume, make-up, stage props, etc. (*aharya*) and involuntary, of the temperament and emotional, etc. (*sattvika*).

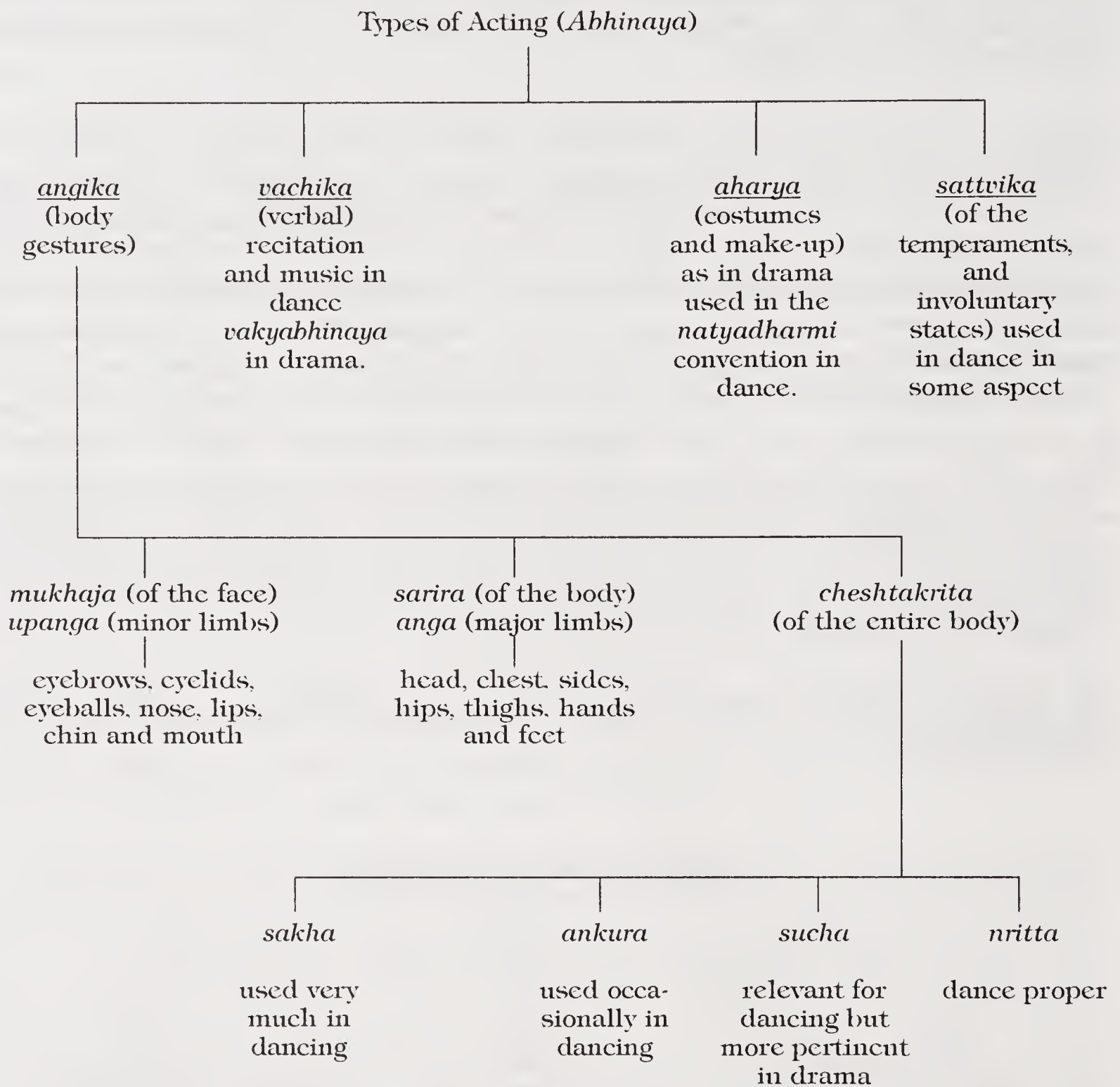
Related to these are other principles, such as, the concept of external or irregular (*bahya*) and inner or regular (*abhyantara*) enacting, of the regional variations (*pravrittis*), of basic presentation (*samanyabhinaya*) and special or mixed representation (*chitrabhinaya*). Indeed it is the combination of all these principles and conventions which accounts for classical character of the dance in contemporary stage presentation. In the *Natyasastra*, these principles have been discussed in the chapters on dramaturgy and histrionics and not particularly in the context of dance or drama alone. It is the later texts, dealing with dance as an independent art, which consider these principles only in relation to dance. We find a full and independent treatment of dance from the point of view of the principles enumerated above for the first time only in *Abhinaya Darpana*. This is followed by the later writers of the treatises on dance proper. Sarangadeva and the writers of the *Vishnudharmottara Purana* and the *Natyasastra Sangraha* all follow this analysis.

The different aspects of dramaturgy, as pertinent to dance, are shown in the following chart:





Aspect (c) above, i.e. types of acting, can be further broken up as indicated below:



Techniques of basic representation (*samanyabhinaya*) irregular (*bahya*) and regular, or inner coherence (*abhyantara*) and special or mixed representation (*chitrabhinaya*) are in turn composed of different elements of the four types of *abhinaya* described above. Originally, it would appear dance technique evolved directly out of the diverse elements of the *dharmis*, the *vrittis*, and the *abhinaya* mentioned above. Judging from the divisions made in later texts like the *Abhinaya Darpana* and *Sangitaratnakara*, dance technique, as distinct from the technique of drama, utilizes drama (*natya*) as one of its aspects.

### Technique

According to the *Abhinaya Darpana*, the *Sangitaratnakara* and other medieval treatises, dancing is divided into three distinct categories, namely, *natya*, *nritya*



and *nritya*. *Natya* here corresponds to drama, and *nritya* to gesticulation when it is performed to the words sung in a musical melody. *Nritta* corresponds to pure dancing where the movements of the body do not express any mood (*bhava*), and do not convey any meaning. All these aspects use movements of the limbs and poses of the human body as their medium.

The other type of distinction stated by these texts is that of *Tandava* and *Lasya*. However, the *Natyasastra* does not state this distinction explicitly. Rather the *Natyasastra* uses the word *Tandava* as a generic term for dancing which cannot necessarily be interpreted as denoting violent dancing, or as that performed by men alone, or even a special type of dancing. The fourth chapter is entitled *Tandavalakshanam* and the term *tandava* is used there for the particular dance which Tanduvā composed, by combining the *rechikas*, the *angahara* and *pindi* (invented by Siva) with song and instrumental music. This dance was to be performed generally for the adoration of the gods and its gentler aspect which is termed as *sukumaraprayoga*. This was to be used in the erotic sentiment (*Sringara rasa*).

The word *lasya* is used, in later chapters as a synonym occasionally for *tandava*. Also, in the description of the ten types of drama, *lasya* is one of the forms mentioned. The *Abhinaya Darpana* and *Sangitaratnakara*, however, clearly describe *tandava* as derived from Tanduvā and *lasya* as derived from Parvati who taught it to Usha, daughter of Bana.

Hence the technique of classical Indian dancing can be classified either under *nritya*, *nritta* and *natya* or *tandava* and *lasya* or *sukumara*. The terms *nritta* and *abhinaya*, *tandava* and *lasya* are also prevalent among practising dancers, and from north to south, and from the east to the west, we find that dancers speak an identical language of basic technique, even though there are significant variations in interpretation. The preservation of the continuity of the basic principle of the *Natyasastra* in these dance styles is impressive. Its continual change and modification is also significant.

On this basis, the technique of dancing can be classified under two clear heads, pure dancing (*nritta*) and dancing with miming and gesticulation (*nritya*). It would be more appropriate to term the latter as *angika-abhinaya* or just *abhinaya* which is also the term popularly used by practising dancers for the mime aspects of the dance.

### Dance (*nritta*) technique

The *nritta* technique of Indian dance is the law and methodology of human movement. The sculptural quality of Indian dance does not need emphasis, but it must be understood that the pose or stance in the dance is all important. Indian dance is, in fact, a stringing together of a number of highly stylized and



symbolic poses. The *nritta* technique encompasses not only the technique of rendering rhythm (*tala*) through movements which do not have meaning, but also the important feature of projecting specific poses within a given rhythmic cycle.

Indian dancing seeks to depict the perfect point or moment of balance along the vertical median (*brahmasutra*) so much so that all movements emerge from the returns to the *sama* or point of perfect balance akin to the *samabhanga* of sculpture. Indian dance concerns itself with the movement of the human form in direct relation to the pull of gravity. Such a conception accounts for the absence of great leaps and gliding movements in the air, so characteristic of the Western ballet. In the latter, a movement in space where the human form is free from gravity is emphasized. Western ballet strives thus to eliminate space by covering as much space as possible, whether floor-space or airspace. It cuts space into chunks of movement, leaps and floor choreography. These are woven into the most intricate patterns. The Western dancer is reaching out into space vertically and horizontally in order to arrest a moment of perfect dynamic movement. Whatever perfection the Western dancer achieves, he does by making geometrical patterns in space, where movement is conceived as an attempt to be free from gravity. The Indian dancer, on the other hand, attempts quite the opposite; consequently the two differ completely in their approach to movement. The Indian dancer's preoccupation is not so much with space as with time, with the dancer constantly trying to achieve the perfect pose to convey a sense of timelessness. The human form here achieves geometrical shapes in time rather than in space, for the intricacy of the *nritta* technique depends on the very fine and deliberate manipulation of rhythm (*tala*) to achieve a series of poses. The perfect pose is a moment of arrested time in limited space.

Except for certain aspects of Kathakali and the Chhau forms, none of the Indian dance styles use large leaps; and little or no discussion of them appears in the treatises on Indian dance. Bharata has not analysed or discussed the possibilities of movement in space where both hands and feet lose contact with the ground in any one of the 108 *karanas* or the 32 *angaharas* which he discussed in great detail. The entire system of "movement" composition has thus to be understood with this basic difference from Western classical conception. As Indian drama deliberately avoids depicting certain human experiences, so Indian dance purposely emphasizes only certain types of movement. It has explored the full possibilities of those movements within consciously imposed limitations.

The Indian dancer is not concerned with the musculature of the human form, but rather, like the sculptor, takes the joints and fundamental anatomical bone-structure of the human form as its basis. From such a basis the dancer strives to achieve absolute form, since the muscles cannot suggest absolute form and create abstract geometrical patterns easily. The different parts of the



body and their respective movements have been analyzed from this point of view. It is from the key joint of knee, hip and shoulder that movement emerges in both the lower and upper limbs; the neck joint is the pivot for movements of the head and face.

The *Natyasastra* presents two types of classifications for movement. There is first the analysis of different parts of the human body with regard to the possibility of movement. Chapter VIII and IX of the *Natyasastra* contain detailed analysis of the movement of major and minor limbs (the *angas* and *upangas*). This is followed by a discussion on basic stances i. e. the *sthanas* the combination of these primary movements, such as *charis*, *mandalas*, *karanas*, etc. According to this classification, the head, hands, breast or chest sides (waist), hips and feet constitute the major limbs (*angas*) and the eyes, eyebrows, nose, lips, chin, mouth, etc., constitute the minor limbs (*upangas*). Bharata uses the word *upanga* and *pratyanga* virtually synonymously, but does not classify the neck, the arms, belly (*udar*), shanks and knees in either category. Later texts like *Abhinaya Darpana* and the *Sangitaratnakara* classify these as *pratyangas*. Analysis of the knee (*janu*), ankles (*gulpha*) and toes occurs only in later texts. However, wrist movements receive full coverage in the *Natyasastra*.

Some comparative study of the movements of these major limbs, and their correlation to each other, appears in the *Natyasastra*; hands (*hastas*) are the only parts of the human body which have both *nrityahasta* and *abhinayahasta*. In treating all the other parts of the body, movement of the particular part is described and followed by its usage (*viniyoga*) as a part of the *abhinaya* technique. This is especially true of the movements of the minor limbs, particularly the *mukhaja* ones, like the eyebrows, eyeballs, eyelids, chin, nose, lips, etc. On the other hand, thighs, waist, side and chest movements are primarily discussed as *nritya* technique. Their usage, however, is relevant in any study of the *abhinaya* technique.

Bharata discusses and analyses each part of the human body and its possibility of movement. Thereafter, he indicates the basic postures or positions which are the initial moments of beginning movement. He groups positions, called *sthanas* for men and for women separately. However, in actual practice, these are not insulated categories, but are in fact a whole series of basic positions in place. Today, we may understand the concept of the *sthanas* as a concept analogous to the concept of positions in classical western ballet. From amongst the varied types of categorisation, one may choose only five major positions from which emerges a stylized movement of the dance. The first amongst these is the standing position with feet together and no bending of the knees very much like the first position of ballet with the important difference that the toes face in front. In Indian terminology, this is the *samasthana*. The second most important position is the position of the out turned knees and the bent legs. The heels touch each other and the toes of either foot face right and left respectively. This



is analogous to the demi-plie of classical Western ballet. This is the *vaishnavasthana* of Indian terminology. The third is an open position with the same out-turned thighs and calf, out-turned knees but with distance between the two heels. This is equivalent to the position commonly recognised in Western ballet, as the grand-plie. This is the *mandalasthana* of Indian terminology. An intermediary position called the *vaisakhasthana* is important in some styles. Here one toe faces sideways with an out-turned knee and thigh and the other foot is obliquely placed with the toe and knee pointing front. There is then the position with one leg bent and the other extended out. This is *alidha*. The opposite of this is the *Pratyalidha* when the weight of the body is on the foot of the bent leg and the other leg is extended diagonally on one side. From the first position i.e. the *samasthana* emerges the most important single unit of movement of the *nritta* technique of the *natyasastra* system. From this position of an equilibrium equipoised position of the body, different types of feet contact are explored. These are *pada bheda*. When one half of the body is kept static and movement is restricted to the other half by either different types of foot contact or the covering space, it is termed as *chari*. *Chari* literally means 'to walk', but is in fact a term which draws attention to foot contact and exploring space in place when foot contact with the earth is stressed and is called the *Bhumichari* on the Earth—*Chari*, and when elevation for a short duration is suggested, it is called aerial or *Akashakichari*. We may understand the concept of the *charis* as the use of the lower limbs in place and in space. All the *charis* of the first group mention the nature of the foot contact of heel, toe, flat foot as also in combination; added to foot contact are crossing, elevations of the thigh or the calf. The second group suggests a design in space where both feet have to be used. The next stage is a cadence of movement which is made up by the use of different types of *charis* covering space. Movement of the waist and the thighs, neck and the hands are added. The full cadence is then called *Karana*. It has an initial position which is a part of movement and it has a final position. The *Karana* is not a pose as considered by some, but is a complete unit of movement in space. A large cadence of three such primary movements and combinations constitutes a *khanda* i. e. a section, and three-four sections or *khandas* constitute a full circle also now called a *mandala*. These concepts can be understood if we keep in mind that the *chari* is the beginning, the initial static position moving as if in sections along the parameter of a circle and completing the circle in a series of movements. Along this path, many positions and movements are utilised. Some stress foot contacts, others stress the elevation of the leg, particularly the knee to different levels.

The *karana* is the most important primary unit of movement and that is why the *Natyasastra* takes pains to describe the 108 primary cadences of movement which constitute abstract dance. Each of these cadences comprises the separate movement of a foot, calf, thigh, knee, waist, chest, neck, arms and hands, and those capable of combining with other movements. Longer sequences of movements are like garlands and are thus called *angahara*. Whether it is the



*charis* or the *karanas* or the completion along a circular path called the *mandalas*, each of these can be strung together as a necklace i.e. *angahara*. Each limb or part of the body is capable of movement: vertical, horizontal and diagonal. Other parts are capable of circular movements particularly the neck and the waist and the hip. Similarly, the whole body can either cover a circular path or take quick turns or can jump, leap, execute elevations. Each of these possibilities is taken into account by the use of technical terms called the *rechika* i.e. the circular or the turns i.e. *bhramaris*, the jumps, elevations and loss of contact with the ground called the *utplavanas*. The *Natyasastra* also takes into account choreographical patterns of group compositions. These are called the *Pindibandha*. *Pindibandha* must be understood as a design where dancers emerge as a group from a centre and then can form chain patterns or alternating creeper patterns, or centrifugal radii pattern. We must remember, however, that often these technical terms are used in different ways and different contexts by the latter writers. Some of the latter writers, such as Nandikeshvara, the writer of the *Abhinaya Darpana* mentions many more types of elevations i.e. the *utplavanas* than those mentioned by the writer of the *Natyasastra*. These changes signify the changes of emphasis which were taking place in the practice of the dance and are parallel to the sculptural evidence of the contemporary period.

The *bhramaris* of the *Abhinaya Darpana* and the *rechika* of the *Natyasastra* both belong to the class of circular movements which involve either a turning of one part of the body or the whole body, which is termed "spinning" round or "chakkara" in contemporary Kathak terminology. The *Natyasastra* prescribes *rechikas* of the feet (*pada*), waist (*kati*), hands (*hasta*) and neck (*griva*). The waist and the neck are capable of complete circular movement, while the feet and the hands would achieve only a restricted movement within the limitation of the wrist and the ankle joints. By *pada* and *hasta rechika* Bharata means the complete circular movement of the whole leg or arm. This is also clearly denoted in the *Natyasastra*. There are frequent references to these *rechikas* in the literature of the period and in the description of the *karanas*, besides there are descriptions of the individual movements of the different parts of the body. Such evidence points to a great popularity of the spiral, spinning and circular movements in the dance of the *Natyasastra* period. It seems to have enjoyed the same popularity down to the times of Rajasekhara and later writers.

The most important term in the sphere of dance composition found in the *Natyasastra* is the *pindibandha*. The *pindis* are said to have four varieties—*gulma*, *sringkhala*, *latabandha* and *bhedyaka*. The first stands for a sort of collective dance. Perhaps after the main dancer had entered the stage, she was followed by a group of dancers. The nature of the group's formation is not mentioned in the *Natyasastra*, but the name suggests a composition where a closed cluster (*gulma*) would be made by the dancers. The second type of composition is the chain (*sringkhala*) where a chain formation is suggested with



the partners holding hands. Creeper (*latabandha*) suggests a dance composition where the dancers put their arms around each other. The *bhedyaka* is a solo dance. All these are employed in the beginning of the play, and related to *asaritas* (preliminaries) or various kinds. The *pindibandha* is thus employed in the first phase, the *sringhala* at the transition of tempo, the *latabandha* in the middle one and the *bhedyaka* in the last. A perfect system of *nritya* technique is thus visualized by Bharata. It covers all points of articulation of the human body, singly and in combination. It suggests the range of solo performance and group formation or choreography. .

### Nritya or Abhinaya

The miming aspect of the *natya* termed as *angikabhinaya* in the *Natyasastra*, an aspect of the drama proper, is also an integral part of dancing. The principles which govern the *angikabhinaya* technique of drama (*natya*) also apply to the dance (*nritya*) where it is known as *abhinaya*.

The *vachikabhinaya* of the *natya* (where the actors themselves use speech) is replaced by the music accompanying the dance. In the *nritya* portion, musical accompaniment utilizes *svaras* of a melody in a given rhythmic cycle (*tala*) and the variations of *tala* are interpreted by the feet and the other *angas* and *upangas* of the body. In the *abhinaya* portion, the musical accompaniment invariably consists of poetry lyrical or narrative, which is set to music and rhythm. It is this poetry which is interpreted by the dancers. In the actual interpretation, especially in the solo dancing of all the classical styles, it consists of portraying the various transient states (*sancharibhavas*), of the particular dominant state (*sthayibhava*). This is done through a series of variations of the *angikabhinaya* in which each word or line of poetry is interpreted in as many different ways as possible; the dancer interprets through a visual presentation of the theme of the poem which is sung. In doing so, the principle of *natyadharmi* is fully followed—the dancer assumes different roles, without change of dress or costume. .

Giving examples of *natyadharmi*, Bharata has said that if the same actor assumes a different role (in the same play) then it is *natyadharmi*. If there is any play where there is a predominance of graceful gesticulation, it is in the area of *natyadharmi*. Indeed, the whole sphere of dance belongs to the *natyadharmi* mode of presentation where the principle of imitation is nowhere followed, but rather the principal of "suggestions" guides the dancer. There is no attempt, therefore, to present things as they are. An artistic stylization is already implied when the whole range of impersonal human situation and experiences has to be expressed through gestures. This stylization is also seen in the depiction of those emotions which would ordinarily be the sphere of *sattvikabhinaya* in the drama proper, for in dance *abhinaya*, even tears are to be shown through gesticulation in *natyadharmi* rather than by actual weeping. The three types of



gesticulation seen in the abhinaya of the body in drama are of the *sucha*, *sakha* and the *ankura* type which have been mentioned before. Of these three types, the *sakha* type of *angikabhinaya* belongs mostly to dance, for here representation of the theme is made through the use of head, face, thighs, feet, hands, etc. The most suitable *vritti* for the dance is the *kaiseki* which is seen in both the *nritya* and the *nritya* portions. According to Bharata, this *vrittis* is particularly interesting on account of the dancing and singing which are used for its representation. The *vrittis* have their corresponding sentiment (*rasa*) and so they are all witnessed in dancing, especially in the narrative themes and in the presentation of the sentiments in a dance style like the *Kathakali*. .

From amongst the movements of the *angas* and *upangas* mentioned earlier, the *nritya* or *abhinaya* portion depends mostly on the gesture of the hands and face, especially the movements of the eyes, eyebrows, eyeballs, etc.. Next in importance are movements of the head, chest and the thighs. The feet are important, but, less significantly than in the *nritya* portion. The use of feet is governed by the demands of the theme, and so is *hastabhinaya*. The hands (*hasta*) have been grouped under the categories of the single-hand gestures (*asamyuta*) and double-hand gestures (*samyuta*). Each of the hands mentioned under these categories has endless possibilities of movement, and is the vehicle of all entire language of gesticulation. .

Indeed the gesticulation of the hands is the focal point around which everything else revolves. Recognizing this importance, Nandikesvara and the writers after him lay down the famous dictum: "Where the hand goes eyes follow: where the eye goes, there the mood (*bhava*) follows and where the mind goes there arises the sentiment ( *rasa* )". Here, it is necessary to point out that all the primary hand gestures of both varieties mentioned, can be used purely imitatively or suggestively—these can be used to convey ideas and emotion, or as symbols. Through hand-gesticulation, the Universe can be comprehended; the seven spheres, the oceans, rivers, planets, human beings, and animals can be represented. These hands, along with the movements of the eyes and eyeballs, are employed in the basic representation (*samanyabhinaya*) and in the special mixed representation ( *chitrabhinaya*).

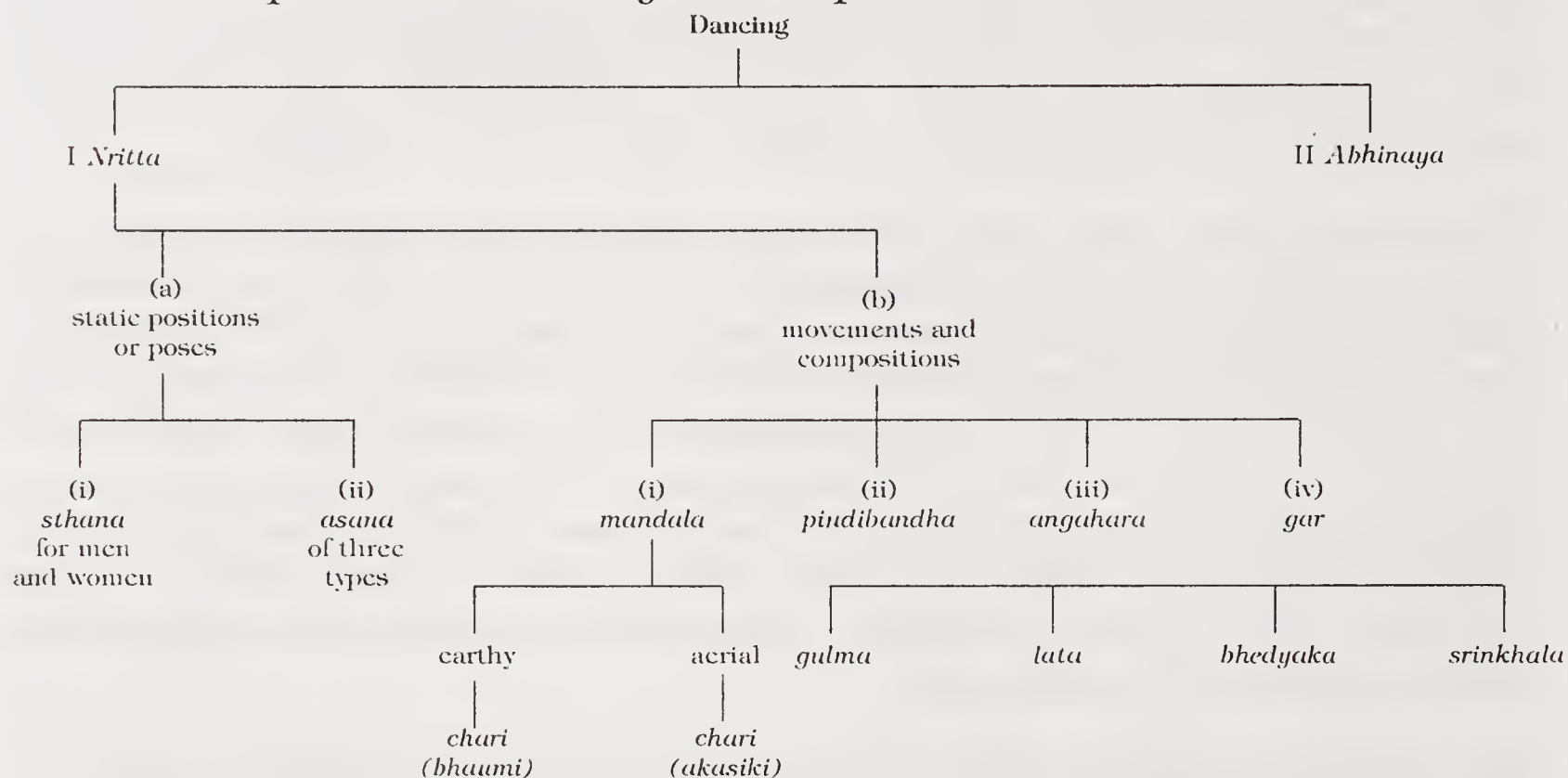
The movement of the different parts of the face and the head specially the movement of eyes, are almost as important as the *hasta* in the *abhinaya* technique of the dance. Each glance and the movement of the eyeballs and eyebrows is related to its corresponding *vyabhicharibhava*, the *sthayibhava* and the *rasa*.

The technique of Indian dance is as complex in nature as the technique of any art in India. It builds from its smallest part into a composite whole by a series of laws applied systematically. All this is done with a view to evolving a particular state of mind or *rasa*, whether it be through *nritya* or *abhinaya*. The following chart will give some idea of the mutual relationships in derivations.

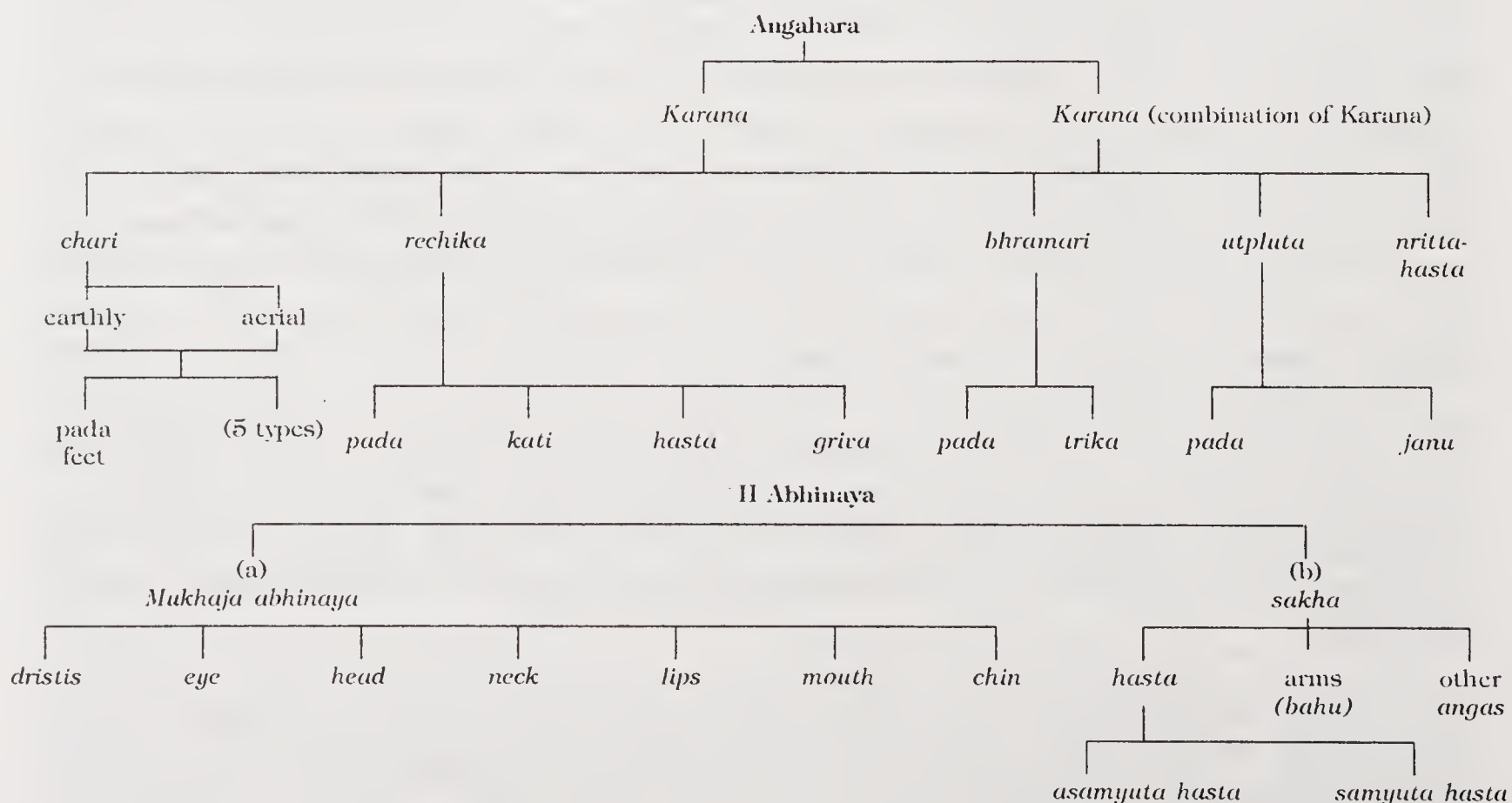


These basic techniques are uniformly applicable to all the classical styles of India. Individual movements vary and the fundamental postures are different and distinctive, but the broad pattern is identical.

The sub-divisions of each of these movements in their usage has not been shown in the above charts: the *angas* and the *upangas* are utilized in both the *nritta* technique and the *abhinaya* technique.



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## BHARATANATYAM

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Bharatanatyam is perhaps the oldest among the contemporary classical dance forms of India. Its claim to antiquity rests not on the name, which is derived from the word “Bharata” and thus associated with the *Natyasastra*, but on the overwhelming literary, sculptural and historical evidence available.

Despite its undebatable antiquity, it is not very easy to reconstruct the history of this dance style called the *Bharatanatyam* over a period of nearly 2000 years. There are two different types of source material from which one can make an attempt to reconstruct the history of this dance style. The first are the Tamil sources. Two important Tamil works, namely *Shilappadhikaram* and the *Manimekhalai* of the Sangam literature, refer to the art of dancing. The word used is *kuttu*. Two types are mentioned viz. (I) *Shanti Kuttu*, and the (II) *Vinoda Kuttu*. Scholars have been of the opinion that *Shanti Kuttu* represents classical form of dance while the *Vinoda Kuttu*, as its name suggests, was a type of entertainment. Although the twelfth century commentary on the *Shilappadhikaram* written by Adiarkunallar clarifies many aspects of the *Shilappadhikaram* and throws important light on the state of dance, it is not easy to deduce that *Shanti Kuttu* represents only a classical form and *Vinoda Kuttu* an entertainment. They may well represent different milieus in which the dance was performed. In these works, there is also evidence of the nature of the technique, the presentation style and the response of the audience. Other Tamil works support the evidence of *Shilappadhikaram* and the *Manimekhalai*. The second source is that of Sanskrit texts. Sanskrit texts and literature reached Tamil Nadu and the Southern States fairly early. Amongst the many forms and styles of dance described in the *Natyasastra*, there is the *Dakshinaya*. Also there is another generic type called the *Ekharya Lasyanga*. In this form, there is one actor playing many roles. The *Natyasastra*, in this context, also speaks of the actor as the narrator. Instead of many actors presenting a dramatic story, the solo actor presents, through the four types of *abhinaya*, the particular dominant state (*sthayibhava*). The present Bharatanatyam can be traced back to this form. The technique of human movement which this style follows can also be traced back to the fifth century A. D. from sculptural evidence. It has been established from that the position common to the classical dance (*margi* style) was the *ardhamandali* with the out-turned knees. By the tenth century A D., this basic



position was common to dance styles from Orissa to Gujarat and from Khajuraho to Trivandrum. From about the tenth century A. D. in sculptures of dance, we find that this basic position of the lower limbs is common to reliefs in practically every part of India.

After the tenth century, Bharatanatyam seems to have developed chiefly in the South and gradually came to be restricted to what is now known as Tamil Nadu. From chronicles we learn that the Chola and the Pallava kings were great patrons of the arts. Raja Raja Chola not only maintained dancers in the temples in his kingdom but was a very great connoisseur of music and dance. It was not unknowingly or unwittingly that one of the Chola kings gave himself the title of *Nritta Vinoda*.

The tradition of the *Natyasastra* appears to have been widespread. The accuracy with which the artist of the Brihadesvara temple in Tanjore has illustrated the *Karanas* of the fourth chapter of the *Natyasastra* is adequate proof of their understanding of the laws of dance movement.

About the fourteenth century A.D. we find that technical illustrations of the dance movements were made in the Sarangapani temple at Kumbakonam and in the four magnificent *gopurams* of the Nataraja temple in Chidambaram. Illustrations of the *charis* and the *karanas* are found in temples of Gangaikonda Cholapuram, Kumbakonam, Madurai and Kancheepuram. The sculptural evidence can be supplemented amply by the evidence of mural painting in the sites of Brihadesvara, Kanchipuram, Punamalai and Chidambaram; this is further supported by the evidence of the *sastras*, textual criticisms, historical chronicles and creative literature.

Between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries, there was much repetition of dance poses already sculptured in the four main temples mentioned above. From the creative literature in Tamil, Telugu and Kannada, one can easily conclude that the dance was a vigorous and living art. But the story is not complete without mentioning the contributions of the South Indian saint-poets and musicians. Bhakti or devotional cult, at its finest and purest, was infused into the tradition by these poets. The literary content of Bharatanatyam was provided by them and their musical compositions determined the repertoire of Bharatanatyam. The solo or the *sadir nritya* is the direct descendant of this tradition.

It is true that the solo dance was only one of the many classical forms prevalent in South India; it is also true that the solo dance was at best a part of the *Bhagavata Mela Natakams* of the region. However, it would not be incorrect to say that the *ekaharya lasya* of the *Natyasastra* was a distinct form and the 'solo' Bharatanatyam is a direct descendant of this form. Whether the dancer was the *devadasi* of the temple or the court-dancer of the Maratha kings of Tanjore, her technique followed strictly the patterns which had been used for ages. The only



difference between the temple-dancers and the court-dancers seems to have been one of attitude. The literary content of some of the pieces was also different, and the dancers of the courts did come to have passages in which the king rather than god was being adored. But none of these differences was important from the point of view of the development of the essential dance technique.

The Maratha Court of Tanjore provided the milieu for further growth of this art form in the seventeenth, eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. *Sadir Nritya* received a definite shape and design in the hands of these poets, musicians, kings and their distinguished artists courtiers. The word '*Sadir*' owes its origin to the Marathi word '*Sadir*' which means 'To present'. This form was also known as *Dasiyattam*. Although there continues to be controversy about the notion whether or not the present shape and form of the contemporary Bharatanatyam was the gift of the four musician dancers and dance master brothers, popularly known as the Tanjore Quartet, it is clear that the contemporary repertoire of Bharatanatyam was certainly evolved some time around the eighteenth or the early nineteenth century. Chinnayya, Ponnayya, Vadivelu and Sivanandam, the four brothers, adorned the court of Raja Serfoji between 1798 and 1832. They had received inspiration and training from the composer Muthuswami Dikshitar. They had been in the court of king Tulaja and they were the teachers of many renowned dancers and musicians. King Tulaja had composed the *Sangitasaramrit* in Sanskrit and a perusal of this text clearly tells us that the technique of Bharatanatyam or more precisely speaking *Sadir* had been evolved by this time. The Tanjore quartet possibly refined it further and gave a chiselled structure. The tradition of both temple dancing and dance in the court milieu continued until the early part of the twentieth century. In the temples, the *Devadasi* performed dance as part of the *Seva* and in the court milieu professional dancers performed before the patron King to an audience. In the latter, there was some influence and musical compositions which travelled from the Courts of Baroda to Tanjore. From recent researches, it is also clear that what began to flourish in the courts of Tanjore Princes was also a gift of the artistes of other regions of India. This rich and vibrant tradition came to a halt through an act of the Madras Presidency which banned temple dancing altogether and looked down upon those who performed the art. While there may have been good sociological reason for banning dance on account of the low status which was given to the *Devadasis* the ban proved to be a death knell for the artistes.

The period between 1910-1930 may be considered to be a period when this art form received many destructive blows. However, all too soon, there was an equally powerful voice against the social stigma which was attached to the art. Already in 1926, E. Krishna Iyer was carrying on a single handed battle and by 1935, a movement of reconstruction was firmly established. Subramania Bharati had written his patriotic songs and there was an awareness of the rich tradition which was being thrown away in the name of the social reform. In the villages, Bharatanatyam continued as part of the presentation of the *Bhagavata Mela*



tradition in the villages of Nellore, Melattur, Soolmanglam, etc. However, here only it was men who performed the dance. The efforts of E. Krishna Iyer and later of other pioneers, including the Kalyani daughters and of Km. Bharati all put together, lit a small torch for a new awareness. On this scene came others from very different background. Rukmini Devi decided to study Bharatanatyam under the grand old master Meenakshi Sundaram Pillai and from Mylapur Gauri Amma. In 1936, she gave her first performance. This was the lighting of a new fire. Finally, there was the emergence of dancers from the families of the traditional repositories. The most important amongst those Devadasis who decided to perform in the public was Balasaraswati. She gave her first public performance outside the traditional milieu in Varanasi in 1935. Two streams came together in the mid 30s: (1) traditional dancers being inheritors of the traditional *Devadasis* who now began to perform before public audiences outside the temple and the court milieu. (2) girls and women with an affluent background of high social status belonging to the Brahmanical society, such as Rukmini Devi and Km. Kalanidhi. They trained themselves in the art as an artistic and academic discipline. Both types of artistes performed before large audiences. The Music Academy, an institution devoted to the preservation and conservation of these arts, proved to be the forum for such recitals. The post-Independence period was an era of revival and reconstruction. Institutions begun by Rukmini Devi, recitals performed by Balasaraswati and disciples trained by Meenakshi Sundaram Pillai, such as Shanta Rao, all left a deep impact. Some continued the tradition of their peers: others reconstructed and recombined fragments they found into a new whole.

### Technique

Bharatanatyam technique may be discussed under two broad heads, namely *nritta* and *abhinaya*. The *nritta* aspect has to be understood as a technique of human movement. In the *Natyasastra* terminology, one may say that it utilizes all the major limbs (*angas*) and minor limbs (*upangas*). However, this in itself does not give us a clue to the exact nature of the stylisation of Bharatanatyam.

In Indian dance the human body has been conceived of as a mass which can be equally divided along a central median. Further movement is determined by the nature of deflections from this median. It is only when the weight is equally divided that the completely balanced (*samabhanga*) position emerges. In poses where there is only one deflection, the slightly imbalanced (*abhanga*) position emerges. In postures with more than two deflections on opposite sides of the central median, the thrice-deflected (*tribhanga*) position emerges. What is distinctive in Bharatanatyam is the fact that it conceives of movement in space mostly along either straight lines or in triangles. The head forms the first unit and lateral movements of the head are common. The torso is seen as another unit and is hardly ever broken up into the upper or



the lower torso. The lower limbs are seen either as straight lines or two sides of an imaginary triangle in space. The upper limbs either follow the lower limbs or weave circular patterns along space which is covered by the lower limbs. It is the latter aspect, along with the use of the torso as a single unit, that gives Bharatanatyam its particularity.

The dancer begins with *samapada* position which is the first basic position, with the feet facing front. The body of the dancer is neither relaxed nor unduly taut. This is followed by turning of the feet sideways which is known as the *kalai tiruppudal* in Tamil. Then comes the *ardhamandali* position in which the feet are sideways and the knees also bend sideways. The *ardhamandali* is often termed as the *ukkaramandali*, the Tamil word *ukkar* literally meaning sitting. The entire movement pattern is built from the first movement in which the feet are turned sideways, the knees are bent and the arms either extended out or placed firmly on the waist. In terms of geometrical design, the dancer is trying to achieve a series of triangles. The line joining the two shoulders may be conceived as the base of one triangle and the waist as the imaginary apex of an inverted triangle. From this apex a second triangle is conceived with the thighs as the two sides and the line joining the two knees as the base of this triangle. The third triangle is formed by the space covered by the two calves and the line joining the two knees. The arms reinforce this by forming other triangles on either side—the extended arm forming one side of the triangle and the line joining the hand to the knee suggesting the second side.

Foot contact is important. In the first position, the entire foot touches the ground and weight is equally distributed. The stamping of this flat foot on the ground is known as *tattu*. In the same position the second type of foot contact occurs, namely, where only the toes of one foot touch the ground and the heel is raised; the third type of foot contact results when the heel touches the ground and the toe is raised. These are the usual movements in the *ardhamandali* position. Then follows the permutation and combination of these positions by the use of either one foot or both the feet.

The unit which emerges as a coordinated pattern of movement of the feet, thighs, torso, arms, hands, neck, head and the eyes is known as the *adavu*. The *adavu* is perhaps the closest to the cadence of movement called the *karana* in the *Natyasastra* terminology. It is not known whether the *adavus* were a continuation of the cadence of movement described in the *Natyasastra*, but it is clear that they appeared to be the descendants of the same principle of kinetics. The *adavu* always begins with a static position in place and then explores the possibility of movement through different types of foot contacts, sole, the toe or the heel and the combination of these, first in place and then in space. In Tamil, *adavu* means *adaibu* which stands for a combination, a *serkkai*. The commentaries of the *Shilappadhikaram* or later inscriptions belonging to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries mention this word. However, there is still no conclusive proof of the



origins of the word. King Tulaja's work written sometime between 1763 and 1787 AD called the *Sangitasaramrita* mentions the names of the *adavus*. It also mentions a set of mnemonics *Sollukattus*, and, of course, later the choreographers, composers, i.e. the four brothers speak of the repertoire which we shall consider shortly.

To return to the *adavus*, these form the basis of the *nritta* technique of Bharatanatyam. Each group is distinctive for its initial starting position and the manner in which the foot, the calf, the whole leg is used. Different family traditions and oral traditions grouped *adavus* into major categories. Most family traditions considered nine major groups. Each of these is again subdivided into several units which can be used singly or in combination. The *adavus* are like phrases in music set in sequential time and they can be utilised within a metrical cycle, a *tala*, in a number of ways, giving rise to new varieties. Most of these major categories of *adavus* begin and return to the *ardhamandali* or the *ukkaramandali* position. They begin from a moment of stasis, go through a sequence of movement and return to another moment of stasis as if it is movement frozen in time. Symmetrical patterning of movement is essential. The training begins by executing a movement first by right foot and then by the left foot. This principle is essential so as to repeatedly remind both the dancer and the spectator of the juxtaposition of stasis and dynamics. One half of the body is static, the other half of the body is in movement. All movement is conceived in relation to the ground and the invariable, hypothetical, vertical median or the *brahmasutra*.

The first of these *adavus* is known as the *tatta adavu* suggesting flat foot contacts in the basic *ardhamandali* position (a position akin to but not identical to demi plie of Western classical ballet).

The second variety of the *adavu* is known as *tei yum dat ta tei yum ta ha*. This group is known as the *nattu adavu*. It also begins from the second position of the *ardhamandali* i.e. knee and foot outturned but it explores space through extension of legs. Thus its chief feature is the *alidha sthana* where one leg is bent, the foot of this leg is flat, the knee is outturned, the other leg is extended out, first to the right and is then brought back to initial position. This is repeated with the right leg and foot in stasis, and left leg extended. Later each leg in turn is extended to front and is brought back behind the static leg. The dancer begins by first holding the *ardhamandali* position and then extends one leg to one side along with an extended arm. The heel touches the ground and the toes are up. This leg is brought back to position and the same is repeated to the other side. After directions to the right and left are explored, directions front and back are explored. Now one leg is extended to the front and then contracted and brought behind the static foot. In other varieties of this group, space is explored with the arms. Also, varying levels are explored; in one such variety, the hand touches the foot of the extended leg at the ground level and is taken back to the head level.



The *Theyyumdatta* variety of *adavus* is both excellent exercise and is typical of the dance style because it gives the dancer immense scope for the execution of terse lines demanded by the style. It also gives the dancer the possibility of exploring space while being in place. Space around her and space at different levels is as if demarcated through the movement of the legs, the hands and the arms. Along with the beautiful clear leg extensions, the torso is used as one unit and the extended and contracted arms follow the leg movement. All in all this results in the execution of many sculptural poses so characteristic of Bharatanatyam.

The third group is *tat tai tam*. Once again, the dancer begins from the basic *ardhamandali* or *ukkaramandali*. However, now a combination of foot contacts is explored. There is initially a flat foot, then a slight jump on the toes and a return to the flat foot i. e. a combination of stamping of feet, jump on toes and toe-heel movements are introduced for the first time. This group is then a combination of both *tattu natu*. Also in this group, levels are introduced. There is the standing, there is the demi-plie or *ardhamandali* and there is the outturned kneeling. One of these varieties include jumping on both toes slightly in the initial *ardhamandali* position followed by the right foot and then the left foot stamping the ground. There is also the slight jump on the toes followed by stamping of both heels on the ground. After exploring different foot contacts in the *ardhamandali* position a combination of these foot contacts and leg extensions is executed. This is further developed in another variety where beginning with the *ardhamandali*, there is a leg extension in the *alidha*, a turning in place around the fulcrum of the body, followed by a leg extension. Arms move in diagonal patterns. This group of *adavus* enables the dancer not only to explore immediate space in place by the movement of her legs, torso and arms, but also enables her to explore space through half turns and juxtaposing symmetrically the lower half and the upper half of the body. Some varieties in this group of *adavus* are complex and provide for much scope for the use of semicircles, diagonals, and vertical and horizontal lines.

The fourth variety is the *tei hat tei hi*. Here, the distinctive feature is the slight jump on both toes followed by stamping of both feet together. There are a number of ways to execute this and some of the lovely rhythmic sequences of Bharatanatyam with extended arms and closing arms are done in this *adavu*. A subdivision of this group is the sliding or the slipping sideways of both the feet in an erect position. Here, the dancer does not execute the movement in the *ardhamandali* position, but glides in an erect posture sideways and then uses the heel-toe movement rather than the toe-heel movement. The final sequences of the *tillana* done in the third tempo are usually built on this *adavu*.

The fifth group is the *tat tei ta ha*. Here the dancer learns a variety of permutations and combinations which she can use in all the different types of the Indian *tala* system, namely the *jatis*. The first subdivision is usually stamping of the right foot and then the left foot, followed by a jump on the heels,



on the third beat, and stamping of only the right foot on the fourth beat. This is repeated by beginning the sequences with the left foot. The building of complex rhythmical structures from this basis gives much of the particular style and flavour of Bharatanatyam.

The sixth group has two varieties and is known as the *tei tei ta adavu*. In this, the dancer tries to build up movement by the use of only one foot or leg in groups of three beats.

The next group known as the *di di tai* has nearly 16 varieties and is another example of the number of permutations and combinations which can be woven around a basic movement executed to three beats. Certain varieties of this *adavu* provide the climax to dance sequences or cadences known as the *tirmanams* in Bharatanatyam. The *di di tai* group, in its simplest form, is the use of the extended leg and its contraction. A typical example is the right leg extended front, the heel beating the ground, followed by the left foot in place stamping the ground. The right foot is brought back to place in the third beat and stamps the ground in the *ardhamandali* position. In another variety, the arms weave circular patterns in contrast to the straight frontal ones of the lower limbs. The right hand, which is first extended in front, gradually moves back to the shoulder level on its own side, while the left hand goes back and, by the turning of the waist, is brought over the head and into a front-down position usually ending in the *hasta* known as the *alapadma*. .

The eighth group is sometimes known as the *poi adavu*, meaning the soft silent dance patterns, with graceful hops and jumps. While there are many varieties of this *adavu*, its distinctive feature is the lifting of the feet very silently to a new position. Such extensions, front and back, are common. Some of the jumps of Bharatanatyam belong to this group. Portions of dance numbers such as *Jatisvaram* are executed in this *adavu*. .

The final and the ninth group is called *ta dit dit tai*. Here, the arms provide variation while stamping in the *ardhamandali* remains constant. A combination of this variety and the seventh group provides many complex, improvised patterns on the basic *tala*.

The groupings of *adavus* differ from family to family in the Bharatanatyam *sampradaya*. However, the system of the *adavu* as a basic unit is followed rigorously, only its categories may differ. A number of these *adavus* can be knit together to form sustained dance sequences. These dance patterns are known as the *tirmanams*. The difference between an *adavu* and a *tirmanam* is perhaps slight but a very real one. Actually the word *tirmanam* is literally used for the rhythmic syllables spoken by the dance conductor as he plays on the cymbals. The *tirmanam* is recited vocally and has its own mnemonics (*sollukattu*). The *adavus* and the *tirmanams* are set to the beats of a *tala*. In a *tala*, certain beats are



important and receive stress. For instance, in a *tala* called the *triputa* which may be expressed in terms of Western music as the 7/4th metre, the first, the fourth and the sixth are stressed. The weaker beats are counted only by the fingers or waiving of the hand. In the most common *adi tala*, which consists of eight beats, the first, the fifth and the seventh are stressed. The *tirmanam* can be performed either only on a drum (*mridangam*) or to a sung melodic line. In the *nritta* portion, the dancer first performs these patterns only to the beat of the drum and then, as she proceeds, executes them to the sung melodic line. Some of these patterns will be analyzed in the discussion of the repertoire. An *adavu* is a *Karana*, a *tirmanam* a combination of *adavus* or an *anghara* culminating normally in a triplet.

### The Repertoire

The Bharatanatyam dancer's repertoire is extensive. Both from literary and from sculptural evidence it is fairly well-established that the dance was performed both as a solo dance and in groups. However, the present form of Bharatanatyam crystallised as a solo dance about the nineteenth century, primarily through remarkable contribution of four brothers from Tanjore—Chinnayya, Ponnayya, Vadivelu and Sivanandam. The repertoire as it is danced today, conceives of the dance as a narration by the dancer rather than a performance of a single role. It is possible that the dramatic tradition of Bharatanatyam is represented in *Bhagavatamela*, which conceives of the dance both as solo and group, while the *devadasi* tradition is dominantly of solo dance. While it is generally accepted that Bharatanatyam belonged chiefly to the temple and its precincts, historical evidence does support the possibility that the traditions of temple dancing and court dancing shared much in common. The difference was in the attitude and degree of abstraction rather than in intrinsic quality.

The present discussion is confined to the repertoire of solo performance only. The scope of the performance, as evolved in the courts is more or less adhered to by performers of Bharatanatyam today, their different family traditions (*sampradaya*) notwithstanding. Of course, new numbers are constantly added to the repertoire. Of late, there has been a revival of the initial numbers, called *Puspanjali* mentioned in texts like the *Nrityaratnavali*.

### Alarippu

Normally, a recital opens with *alarippu*, considered an invocation. It is performed only to the rhythm of the drum (*mridangam*). This is a perfect example of the pure, abstract dance (*nritta*), executed through a number of concentrated, yet elemental rhythmic patterns. The basic and most significant movements are introduced almost like the introduction of the chief notes of a melodic scale, in ascending and descending order. Beginning with perfect repose and an attitude of perfect equilibrium (*samabhanga*) in the standing posture, the movements of neck, shoulder and arms are introduced with great charm. This is



followed by the *ardhamandali*, spoken of earlier. In the final sequences, the full *mandali* is introduced and the dance ends with a small *adavu* or dance cadence. The movements of all major and minor limbs are employed in their simplest forms. It may be said that this is the warming-up dance for the entire performance. The precursor of the *alarippu* was undoubtedly the *pushpanjali*, a dance composition common to almost all styles of the country. It has been identified as the *Rangapuja* mentioned in the *Natyasastra*. The *Rangapuja* literally means the worship of the stage while *pushpanjali* is the offering of flowers. The basic attitude of these items is obeisance to the God of Dance.

### Jatisvaram

The next piece is another example of a pure dance (*nritya*) composition in which the performer weaves several patterns on a basic musical composition. Indeed, the word *jatisvaram* is the name of a musical composition which follows the rules of the *svara jati* in musical structure and consists of three movements—*pallavi*, *anupallavi* and *charanam*. It is distinguished from other musical compositions called the *gita* or *sabdam* or *varnam* by having no lines of poetry (*sahitya*) in it. The sol-fa passages are all important and the composition is set to any of the five time units (*jatis*) of the metrical patterns (*tala*) of Karnatak music, namely, 3,4,5,7,9. The basic metrical cycle which guides the musician also guides the dancer. To the repetition of the sung melody, the dancer weaves different types of rhythmic patterns from the primary dance cadences (*adavus*). Here, the dancer introduces, for the first time, full sequence of various types of *adavus*. Usually, the combinations are of the simplest kind and the dancer attempts to present patterns only in one group of *adavus* or another. The dance composition relates to the melodic line, sometimes through a note to note synchronization and, at other times, through syncopation. Further, first note of the melodic line, the first beat of the metrical cycle and the end of the dance sequence synchronize perfectly. The dance cadences are also set to the full line of the note (*svara*) and combinations of different *svaras* especially in the second half, the *anupallavi* portion. The dance patterns are invariably conditioned by the nature and duration of the *svara*. A simple example of this is given below:

In *raga Kalyani* the *pallavi* runs

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Sa	—	—	Ni	Dha	Pa	Dha	Ma	Ga	Ri	Ni	Ri
Sa	—	—	Ni	Ri	Ga	Ma	Ga	Ma	Pa	Dha	Ni

In the *Jathisvaram* in the *raga Saveri* they are:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Sa	—	—	—	Ri	Sa	Dha	—	Pa	Ma	Ga	Ri
Sa	—	—	—	Ni	Dha	Sa	Ri	Ma	Pa	Dha	Ri



We notice here that each melody consists of twelve beats but the time interval and the pause position of the notes differs. While composing the dance pattern on each of these melodies, the dancer has to bear in mind the exact treatment of the note in the melody and the dancer's patterns are governed by the musical pattern. The cross rhythms and the non-synchronized patterns of the dance when the dancer deliberately does not execute a note to note synchronization is equally governed by the musical melody and the metrical cycle (*tala*). To a *svara* pattern of

Sa — Ga Ri Sa Ni — Ri Sa Ni Dha — Pa Ma Pa

the dancer achieves a note to note synchronization by executing.

Tai — Tai Hat Tai Hi — Tai Hat Tai Hi — Tai Tal Ta—

and to

Ri — Ga Ma Dha Ga — Ma Dha Ni Ma — Dha Ni Ri

and the dance pattern

Tai — Di Di Tai Tai — Di Di Tai Tai — Di Di Tai

It will be observed that, in the first portion, there is general synchronization of the dancer's movements and the notes (*svaras*) of the melodic line. In the second portion, there is a note to note synchronization of the movements with the notes (*svaras*) of the melodic line. The Jatisvaram then becomes a dance composition which enables the dancer to present as much of pure dance as she can. It provides opportunity for presenting a wide range of improvisation both in terms of the *adavu* sequences and rhythmic patterns.

### Sabdam

The piece that follows is called the *sabdam*, again a composition in Karnatak music. Here, the dancer performs to a song and introduces mime. The miming is deliberately elementary and only the literal illustration of the word is presented through movement. The end sequences of this short number are of pure dance and serve as a bridge between the pure *nritya* compositions like the *alarippu* and the jatisvaram on the one hand and the major composition of the *varnam* on the other.

### Varnam

After having introduced substantially all elements of the dance, the dancer proceeds to render the *varnam*, which is easily the most intricate and complex number. The *varnam* provides the fullest scope to the dancer to improvise on a given theme. Like the *Jatisvaram* and *sabdam* the *varnam* is essentially a musical composition rendered through dance.



The dancer begins by presenting gigantic cadences of *tirmanams*, to a repetitive line of song. These *tirmanams* are woven in three tempos, making the dance composition highly elaborate. The introduction demands the most exacting synchronization between the dancer, the singer and the drummer. The mnemonics used by the drummer and the dancer and those recited by the dance conductor (*nattuvanar*), who wields the cymbals, are all different; but each has a very intimate relationship with the melodic line and with one another. The architectonic structure of the *varnam* results from this many-levelled layers of the musical theme. Such diversification of the musical phrase by the singer, the drummer, the conductor and the dancer leads to a final synchronization when the end of the *tirmanam* coincides with the first note of the song. .

The structure and the sequence of the *varnam* could be roughly described as follows:

<i>Tirmanam</i>	<i>to first line</i>
<i>Abhinaya</i>	<i>to first line</i>
<i>Tirmanam</i>	<i>to first line</i>
<i>Abhinaya</i>	<i>to second line</i>
<i>Tirmanam</i>	<i>to second line</i>

The beginning of each pure dance (*nritya*) sequence is announced by constant stamping of the feet which maintains the inner beat of the time cycle. At the same time the drummer prepares through a particular rhythmic sequence for the next sequence. The dancer then performs:

<i>Tirmanam</i>	<i>to second line</i>
<i>Tirmanam</i>	<i>to third line</i>
<i>Abhinaya</i>	<i>to fourth line</i>
<i>Tirmanam</i>	<i>to fourth line</i>

The *svara* of the fifth line is then sung and an *adavu* is executed in the same manner as in the *jatisvaram*. After this, the first line of the *pallavi* is repeated with *abhinaya* and then the same *abhinaya* is performed to a characteristic toe-heel (*tatta mittu*) foot-pattern, ending with a phrase which is repeated usually three times and is called the *araddi*. This combination of the toe-heel pattern with miming is the most challenging part of the *varnam*.

### Abhinaya Padams

A period of relaxation or ease is called for immediately after this elaborate piece which can last about an hour and it is provided not by a musical interlude, but by the dancer herself. She presents short numbers called *padams*. The *padam* is best defined as an interpretive dance of a lyrical passage set to music. The *padams* offer an uninterrupted opportunity for mime (*abhinaya*) through the



language of the hands and limbs. Here, the literary content refers usually to a lady in love calling for her lover. In terms of the tradition, the dancer presents a type of heroine (*nayika*) in a state of expectancy of separation or union. The symbolic or the allegorical content of these pieces has to be traced to the *Bhakti* cult, where the human being is the lady-love waiting for union with the Divine visualized as the lover. The pieces, therefore, can be interpreted either secularly or religiously. The literary imagery is so rich and full of traditional allusions that a dancer without adequate background and training tends to execute them only superficially. In the training of a Bharatanatyam dancer this particular area is not taught until she has attained a certain maturity, both in technique and understanding. They seem easy pieces, but when one begins to explore their depths, one realises that they should not be touched by those with insufficient knowledge or by those who are uninitiated. Some of the greatest writers and saint-musicians of South India have been the composers of *padams*. .

The dancer can and sometimes does introduce other compositions such as the *kirtana* or the *svarajati* or the *javali* in her repertoire. The principle underlying these compositions is the same as in the *varnam*, but the emphasis varies, for few pieces have the intricate structure of a *varnam*. .

### Tillana

The recital concludes with a brilliant number of pure dance known as the *tillana*. The *tillana* is a musical composition of mnemonics sung in a particular mode (*raga*) set to a particular metrical cycle (*tala*). The statuesque quality of the dance style is never more dominant as it is in the *tillana*. The dancer, by this time, reaches a degree of plasticity and fluidity of movement that she attempts to reinforce all that she rendered in her recital in a purely abstract number. What she had introduced in the *alarippu*, she fully develops here. Beginning with movements of the eye, she shifts to movements of the neck and then proceeds to movements of the shoulder, of the erect torso, of the outstretched arm positions and of the innumerable standing postures, the leg extensions, the pirouettes and the *ardhamandali* positions. All the tempos are used and, the dance cadences (*karvais*) are designs in space along straight lines, triangles and diagonals. In this number, even semicircles are introduced in floor choreography. The characteristic finale of these cadences are the emphasized *araddis*. Finally, at a fast tempo, the dancer ends her recital either by a concluding *araddi* or by a quick exit in *alapadama hasta*. .

Most dance recitals of Bharatanatyam ended here until a few years ago, but presently there is one more number which was perhaps also performed earlier. That is the final *sloka* in Sanskrit. Just as the *nritta* portion ends in the finale of the *tillana*, the *abhinaya* portion ends with the gravity of a solemn *sloka* invoking God in His peaceful and calm moods. .

This was the most common and characteristic sequence of a Bharatanatyam



recital until the fifties of this century. Many changes and innovations have since taken place. Interesting musical compositions have been used for the dance, the repertoire has been enlarged and the sequence has changed. The *navasandhi* and the sloka have regained popularity and some lesser known *jatisvarams*, *varnams* and *tillanas* have been introduced. Some excellent dance-dramas have been composed. .

The process of constantly revitalizing the tradition by either reviving older forms or by introducing new forms has kept the Bharatanatyam vital and healthy. Changes in repertoire are inevitable and should be welcome. It is, however, the dilution in the quality of the technique which is the cause of some concern. Although the dance style has gained in popularity during recent years, it is in danger of losing austere quality.



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# KATHAKALI

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A very clear demarcation can be made between dance styles and dance-drama forms, especially in the context of Bharatanatyam and Kathak. It is, however, not so easy to make such a demarcation in a style like the contemporary Kathakali, which is the culmination of a long process of evolution and assimilation of different theatrical forms prevalent in South India. It is not a solo dance as the contemporary Bharatanatyam: neither is it a court dance like Kathak, nor lyrical like Manipuri. Instead, the most striking element in Kathakali is its overwhelming dramatic quality; gods and heroes, demons and spirits appear from another world in costumes and headgears which are awe inspiring and belong exclusively to a world of myth and legend.

This dramatic style evolved from the many dance traditions prevalent in the southwestern coastal region of India. From earliest times, Kerala has been the home of innumerable performing arts. Amongst these, some are purely ritualistic in character. They invoke deities, particular spirits, heroes of gone-by days. Attired in costumes made from *arecanut* and palm-leaves with heavy paints on their faces, men are transformed into gods and demons. Sometimes, it is Darika who was killed by Kali as in *Mudiyettu*. At other times, it is different forms of the Goddess Bhagavati who appears in astounding and staggering splendouring attire as in varied forms of the Teyyams. Yet at other times, the deity is first painted on the floor and then the story is enacted by actors to the accompaniment of drums and pipes and a vast variety of other musical instruments. All these, the Kuttus, the Attams and the Bhagavati and the Kali forms are prevalent in Kerala specially in Cannanore and adjoining districts. There are special locations where the Teyyams, the Aiyappan worship and other dramatic rituals are performed. The elaborate make-up on the faces of these actors, who are deified for the duration of the performance, is a class by itself. Perhaps, the elaborate make-up and stylisation of Kathakali can be traced back to this rich and vibrant tradition of ritual forms where deification of the actor took place.

Alongside was the evolution of a highly sophisticated and stylised form of theatre in Kerala called Kudiattam. The history of this form can be traced back to the ninth and tenth centuries. It is considered the most important living link with techniques of the performance employed in Sanskrit plays. It is also the



beginning of many new and important trends in Indian theatre. From the days of Kulashekhar to the performers of the twentieth century, such as Mani Madhava Chakyar and Aminanur Madhava Chakyar, the tradition has been sustained by a particular family traditions. For the first time, in contrast to Sanskrit theatre in Kudiyaattam, one of the characters i.e. the Vidushaka began to play a very important role in the performance. He used the local language, namely Malayalam, in contrast to the other characters. While the Sanskrit words were recited and chanted and communicated by the heroine and the hero, the Vidushaka rendered his lines in Malayalam. It was his task to bridge the gap between classical Sanskrit spoken by the hero and the regional language or dialect understood by the audience. He was also the bridge between the past and the present. As in other theatrical forms, the actor spoke the lines sometimes preceding the movement of the body, sometimes coinciding and sometimes following. The enunciation and the intonation of words was slow, stylised, reminiscent of the chanting of the Vedas. The actor performed *angika abhinaya* to the word or the line, or the phrase. Sometimes, the actor elaborated on the verbal, the Vachika; he interpreted and improvised. Plays lasted for many days because the actor was given the fullest freedom to weave any number of interpretations on the basic poetic line. There was provision in the dramatic structure for the actor to switch back to one of his earlier incarnations to move freely in time past and present and even to indicate the future. In kinetic terms, this meant the evolution of a highly intricate and developed language of gestures. The dramatic structure and the stylised techniques of gestures especially through the hands and through the eyes were so perfected that often the gesture was mistaken for the act. There is a story about a famous Chakyar who showed throwing of a heavy stone at one of his opponents. The enactment was so effective, the energy and the force put into the movement was so great, that half the audience fled in sheer fright. The Kudiyaattam traditions preceded those of Kathakali and were in no small measure responsible for the highly developed language of gestures specially of the face and the hands so typical of Kathakali.

Movements in Teyyams and the Tirayattam were pure dance patterns without content. Masks and face paint were common to these dances, performed in obeisance to different forms of the goddess, especially in forms such as the Mudiyaattu, the Kolam Tullal, etc. Thus both Kudiyaattam and the ritual forms contributed to the evolution of Kathakali. A third and final source was the variety of martial dances known to Kerala. Kerala is famous even today for its numerous martial dances and the *kalaris* (gymnasium) are remarkable for the physical skills and acrobatics. The excellent body-training of Kathakali dancers, the massaging system and the fantastic leg extensions, jumps and leaps in the technique have been assimilated from these numerous forms of dramatic spectacle including a healthy tradition of acrobatics, fencing, etc.

While the *kuttus*, *tullals*, *attams*, Bhagavati and Kali forms contributed to aspects of contemporary Kathakali, it emerged as an independent, highly formalistic, dance-drama form only in the seventeenth century. Two kings gave



Kathakali its present form. The origin of Kathakali is attributed to the Zamorin of Calicut in the seventeenth century. A devotee of Krishna, he wrote plays known as *Krishnattam* which were patterned on the lyrics of the Gita Govinda by Jayadeva. The *Kishnattam* plays designed to be performed for eight successive nights, were serialized to present a different episode from the life of Krishna each day.

According to legend, it is believed that the Raja of Kottarakara requested the Zamorin of Calicut to send his troupe to Travancore to perform *Krishnattam*. The Zamorin is said to have refused. The result of his refusal was extraordinary. It is believed that the Raja of Kottarakara began to write a series of eight plays about Rama which were called Ramanattam as distinct from the *Krishnattam*. By some accounts, it appears that these plays were staged at the court of the Raja of Kottarakara in the latter half of the seventeenth century. Some scholars however believe that this may have happened earlier. In any case, whether it was as a reaction to the Zamorin of Calicut's refusal or it was an independent creative urge, a form which was to be the true precursor of Kathakali evolved.

A new movement was thus heralded. *Krishnattam* had used Sanskrit profusely. *Ramanattam* was written in Malayalam even if it was highly Sanskritized Malayalam.

The blend known as Manipravala to Kerala literature was used and this was admirably suited to the stage. Some people are of the view that initially the actors of the *Ramanattam* plays also spoke and sang their lines like their *Kudiyattam* counterparts. A few scholars believe that actors spoke their own lines, did gesticulation, wore wooden masks like the *Krishnattam* players. Whether this is true or not, it would appear that very soon the enunciation by the actors of the lines gave place to the actors restricting themselves to elaborate miming (*angika abhinaya*) and the musicians singing the lyrics. Gradually, this acting without word or pantomime was further refined; eventually it reached a sophistication which we recognise as Kathakali. The music had a very specific libretto which was sung; it was accompanied with instrumental music and percussion. The two together, the vocal and instrumental, were and are integral to dramatic spectacle. As in Bharatnatyam, the musical structure of the dramatic plays determined the dance structure. Passages of pure dance were introduced in full measure. Basically, however, the dramas, now called the *attakathas*, were the foundation on which the dramatic structure was built. Many writers especially Iryaman Tampi were the writers of dance drama now called Kathakali. The themes were no longer the stories of Krishna or Rama; they were chosen from the Mahabharata, from the Bhagavata Purana, from the Siva Purana, and from the vast body of mythological themes known to Indian literature in their special Kerala versions. Many writers, apart from the Raja of Kottarakara and Kottayam, wrote plays which have become the basis of the contemporary Kathakali repertoire. The more notable amongst these are those of Kartik Tirunal, Ashvati Tirunal of Travancore, Vidvan Koel Tampuran and, of course, the famous Unnayi Warriar. Iryaman Tampi's play such as the *Kichak Vadham*, *Daksh*



*Yagna*, *Sita Swayamavaram*, are danced repeatedly today. Swati Tirunal, Rama Varma, Maharajas of Travancore patronized the art and gradually two distinct schools of Kathakali emerged, one of the South and the other of the North. This new drama or theatre was a perfect blend of all types of enacting, verbal, kinetic, decor and make-up. Its structure was rigorous and complete; nevertheless, it was popular theatre because it could be presented outside the precincts of the temple. From the courtyard of the temples, it travelled to the courts and eventually to the villages, the fields and the open spaces and, of course, ultimately to the stage.

Many factors contributed to make the evolution of Kathakali possible. Kathakali perfected and further refined the gesture language known to *Kudiyattam*; it drew upon the ritual traditions such as the *Teyyams*, *Mudiyattam*, etc.; it assimilated and refined the martial techniques into stylised art. It was indirectly influenced by the advent of Vaishnavism in Kerala and the *Gita Govinda* tradition. Even when Kathakali flowered profusely and was the most popular, the tradition of *Kudiyattam* on one side and *Krishnattam* on the other continued. Kathakali was a new eclectic entrant. All subscribed to the principle of *Natyadharmi* tradition of Sanskrit theatre. The rich body of Malayalam literature, the several types of literary compositions and dramatic writing provided the theatre artistes and the dramatists with new themes and new inspiration. All these accumulatively gave rise to the art form we call Kathakali. By the seventeenth century, Kathakali had begun to hold its own and be recognised as major dramatic theatrical spectacle, which was being constantly enriched through new themes and great individual acting.

### Texts

The textual evidence supports the view that numerous regional styles were prevalent in the area, all of which seem to have departed somewhat from the tradition of Bharata. Judging from some of the commentaries on the *Silappadikaram*, and *Sangitaratnakara*, it appears that dramatic forms also had undergone change. These also indicate, however, that a distinction was maintained between the pure *natya* forms and the pure dance forms. Words like *Koottu*, *desi nritya*, *desi lasyanga* and *desi karana* came into usage between the thirteenth and the seventeenth centuries, and appear in innumerable texts on dance and drama forms written in South Indian languages.

The most important texts such as *Balarama Bharatam* written by Balarama Varma, the ruler of Travancore (1724–98), and the *Sangita Saramritam* by Tanjore's Maharashtrian ruler, Tulaja, throw no light on *Kathakali* technique. They deal only with the great variety of dance patterns and the numerous possible permutations and combinations which could be achieved in a given sequence. Only sub-chapter in *Balarama Bharatam* mentions various knee positions and leg-extensions comparable to some of the movements employed in *Kathakali* today. Quite obviously the author gave the sanction of the *sastras* to movements known in the gymnasiums as *kalaris* and the movements which are



known to the various *kalis*. The text which helps us most in this respect is the *Hastalakshana Dipika*, which departs considerably from both the *Natyasastra* and the *Sangitaratnakara* traditions.

The temple sculpture in Kerala and the frescoes in the Padmanabhaswami and Mattancheri temple provide evidence of the fact that the basic Kathakali positions employed today were established by the sixteenth century. Sculptural and other evidences convince one that the style prevalent in Kerala was akin to the forms prevalent in the Tamil Nadu area, particularly with regard to the typical *kshipta* position of the knees, extended *lata* arms and the usual accompaniment of drum and cymbals. It is only around the sixteenth century, especially in the frescoes of Mattancheri that examples of the rectangular positions or *mandala sthana* so typical and basic to Kathakali, and the familiar headgears and the sari also appear. All these diverse influences resulted in a distinct and highly stylized technique of dance-drama. Between the seventeenth and nineteenth century, many momentous changes took place in Kerala. While age-old tribal and rural rituals and customs continued in forests and lush vegetation, there was the sophisticated performance in the temple courtyard or special theatres i.e.. *Kuttamabalam*. On streets, in processions or otherwise, there was a variety of forms ranging from the humble *Ottanthullal* martial displays, to the innumerable types of theatrical performances connected with annual festivals such as the Onam along with the Christians, the Portuguese and others who had settled in Kerala. This complex picture of various types of performance and the mutual influence of different traditions is reflected in the dramatic writings of the period. By the early part of the twentieth century, while the ritual dance drama traditions, such as *Teyyams*, the *Bhagavati* cult dances continued, temple dancing and the sophisticated rituals especially of Kudiattam, Kathakali, Krishnattam and Ramanattam seem to have shrunk or at least become fragmented.

As in the case of Bharatanatyam, once again in the 30s of this century, as part of a more pervasive search for Indian identity, Poet Vallathol in Kerala rediscovered or one may say resurrected Kathakali. It was in 1932 that he began Kerala Kala Mandalam which was formally established in 1936. He gathered the great Gurus, Ramamuni Menon, Kunju Kurup and others, reinstalled poetry and literature and gave Kathakali the form in which we recognise it today. Scripts of Kathakali plays written by Unni Warrior and Thampi were employed, a new format was adopted and in so doing, an ancient art had also been given a new sensibility.

### Technique

In technique, Kathakali follows the other classical styles in embodying *nritya* and *abhinaya*. Of course, drama is its soul.

The human body is made up of minute anatomical units which function



individually or in combination with other parts. In none of the other Indian dance styles is the entire body, both the skeleton and the muscular part, used so completely as in Kathakali. In contrast to the other dance forms, the muscles play an important part here and the movements of the facial muscles are a most significant part of a dancer's training. The geometrical pattern which the dancer follows may be described as either a square or a rectangle, with the dancer standing with both feet apart, knees turned out and the outer soles of the feet touching the ground. This position may be identified as the *mandala sthana* mentioned by Bharata. The dancer covers space also in patterns of square and rectangles. The right foot meets the left and covers one side of the square. The dancer moves forward to the third corner of the rectangle and then back to the second corner and finally comes back to the first corner but only touching, all four points. With his arms and hands, the dancer covers space usually in figures of squares and rectangles or clearly-drawn diagonals along these squares and rectangles. Occasionally the hands execute figures of eight and the eyes follow, but the movement sequence always limits itself to the perimeter of the initial imaginary geometric pattern. The knees are always turned out and unlike Bharatanatyam there is invariably space of two to three feet between the feet. The torso is used as one unit or occasionally, two i.e. the upper and lower torso. Jumps, spirals, sweeps and leaps are characteristic. Leg extensions are clear and the weight must be shifted from one foot to the other in these extensions with ease. It is an essential part of the dancer's training to learn how to use each facial muscle separately. The movement of the eyebrows, the eyeballs and the lower eyelids described in *Natyasastra* are not used to such an extent in any other dance style of India. No training is complete without the mastery of these movements.

In the *nritta* portions of Kathakali, the dancer executes leg-extensions and jumps still covering space in a series of squares and rectangles to a given time cycle (*tala*). The units of the *nritta* portion are the *kalasams* which may be compared to the *tirmanams* of the Bharatanatyam technique or the *toras* and *tukras* of the Kathak technique. In Kathakali, as in Bharatanatyam and Kathak, these cadences of dance patterns culminate in compositions known as *araddis* which are usually multiples of three. Other types of *nritta* sequences, based on different ways of manipulating the rhythm, are known as the *adakkams* and the *tomakarams*. The pure *nritta* technique appears in the repertoire mostly as a prelude to the dance-dramas. There are two numbers which may be described as typical *nritta* numbers and these are the *todayam* and the *purappadu*. In both, the dancer begins the movement in the slow tempo of the basic metrical cycle and then to the mnemonics of the *mandalam* and the *chenda*, executes the *nritta* patterns. The hand or arm gestures here are few and, usually, only variations between the *alapadma* and the *hamsasya*.

The *Kalasams* is the most fundamental unit of a cadence of movement in Kathakali. As in the case of different types of sequential movements in Bharatanatyam, so also in Kathakali, there are the doubled *Kalasams* which



normally are longer than the smaller units, sometimes these culminate as has been mentioned above or in multiples of three. There are even bigger *Kalasams* known as the *Baliya Kalasams*. These are extended passages of dance but always used in dramatic structure. There are then the *Vattam Vachchu Kalasam* which represent covering space in circles. Finally, there is the largest of the longest type of *Kalasams* called the *asthakalasam*. This kinetic phrase is a stringing together of eight different units normally set to a 10-beat metrical cycle called the *champa tala*. It is important to note that each of these *nritya* passages are always used as part and parcel of the dramatic spectacle. These *Kalasams* also have an emotional mood or *bhava*. The manner of the delivery times terse and jerky, and yet at other times these are rendered in a mood of compassion. Always these are conditioned by the mood of the play and the particular situation of the dramatic scene. These can be introduced, within the dramatic structure in a number of ways. For example, some of the *Kalasams* known as the *araddis Kalasams* are used only as the milder forms of heroism or when a romantic scene is being presented. The large big *Kalasams* called the *Baliya* are used in scenes of combat battle or heroism. Similarly, the *astha Kalasams* are rendered only at particular moments. These punctuate the singing of the *padas* and come before or after the *abhinaya* which is normally done or performed to a sung line by two vocalists, the principal and the supporter.

The *abhinaya* technique of Kathakali has such variety and such flexibility that it allows the dancer actor to treat his theme or his character in many ways apart from the possibility of improvising or taking off on the sung words, or dancing the words as in *Choliyattam*. There is always the possibility of some interpolated passages through mime. Here the actor has the fullest freedom, he follows no text and he can improvise to his heart's content. This is known as the *manodharma* of the actor, the musical accompaniment comprises soliloquy or conversation or have flashbacks of the kind noticed in *Kudiyattam*, but all in all, he must keep to the basic character which he is portraying. Everything put together, he must create that dominant mood whether it is of love or humour, compassion or disgust or tranquility.

Like the Chakyar actor of the *Kudiyattam*, Kathakali actor also uses the *hastas* i.e. the hands and the eyes as his most important instruments of communication never forgetting that these are used alongwith other micro movements of the face and the micro movements of the lower limbs and the torso. The Kathakali tradition of the *hastas* is somewhat different from that of the *Natyasastra* and the *Abhinaya Darpana*. Although many names are common, the gestures are different, for example, the extended hand is called the *pataka* in the *Natyasastra* and the *Abhinaya Darpana* tradition, but it is called *tripataka* in the Kathakali tradition. The text followed by the Kathakali actors is the *Hasta Lakshana Dipika* which described 24 basic *hastas* of single hands and an equal number of combined hands. Each *hasta* can be used in its permutation and combination with another *hasta*. It can be used at different levels, it can be used alongwith the movements of the arms and the eyes delicately or with energy or without. All this



makes up for a vocabulary of over one thousand words which can communicate names, verbs, sentences, moods, situations, status and finally inner states of being. The Kathakali tradition has perfected all that was known to the *Kudiyattam* tradition and has certainly enlarged and elaborated the language of gesture which was known to other dramatic forms, but none attained this refined sophistication.

The *abhinaya* is presented in three stages:

(a) word to word synchronisation, (b) interpretation of the full line and (c) *abhinaya* of the dancer following the singer.

There is an aspect of *abhinaya* in Kathakali where the dancer uses the words of the line only as a starting point and improvises a full sequence of movement. Hand-gesture language is most significant here for the elaboration of the word. This position, known as *choliyattam*, is the final test of any great dance imaginative faculties. Although the line of poetry may only say that Bhima went through a forest the dancer is at full liberty to present the forest in all its beauty and splendour. A characteristic example of this kind of *abhinaya* is seen in the dance drama called *Kalyana Sougandhikam* where Bhima is sent by Draupadi to get her the flower. The scenes on his way, which include a fight between a panther and a cobra, movement of herds of elephants, running of swift deer and the dance of the peacocks all are conveyed by the dancer through *abhinaya*. The principle of the *ekaharya*, so characteristic of Bharatanatyam and the Kathak, becomes a part of larger dramatic technique.

Finally, *abhinaya* is also seen in its manifestations of the *vyabhichari* or the *sancharibhava*. Here, the main objective of the Kathakali dancer is to evoke a particular dominant mood (*sthayibhava*). This he does by presenting variation on the same theme.

In the *abhinaya* portions of Kathakali, the *hastas* assume prime importance. While the *hastas* are important in other dance styles, their language is not so elaborate and stylized as in Kathakali. The *Hastalakshana Dipika* mentions more than 500 words and these words are all described in terms of the 24 basic *hastas*. Each *hasta* can be used in its permutations and combinations with another *hasta* to communicate names, verbs, tense, full sentences, moods and finally states of being. Through the language of the *hasta*, one seems how the earlier dramatic traditions have played an important part in shaping Kathakali into its present form.

### Character Types

In Kathakali, the principal characters are types. Each actor presents a particular type rather than being a narrator as in the other solo forms.



The thematic content of the Kathakali dance-drama is derived from the myths and legends of the Hindu epics and the *puranas*. Buddhism was known to Kerala and some Buddhist influence is discernible in its literature. In the theatre, however, the content is almost without exception Hindu. In accordance with certain canons of the epic traditions, drama is built by counterpoising certain types of characters against others. Although the hero and the villain of Sanskrit drama have a place in Kathakali, the different types of heroes known to the Kathakali tradition can be traced back more easily to the epics and the *puranas* rather than to the *nataka*. An examination of the literary works reveals that there were perhaps other types of dramatic rituals in existence earlier, but Kathakali drama during the last 150 to 200 years, has been restricted to about six types. This is a large number when compared to the two or three types of characters found in the folk-drama tradition.

First, there are the demigods or the heroes; they can be generally identified as the *dhirodatta* heroes of the Sanskrit drama or the *sattvika* characters of the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. Gods also belong to the category of good characters and Krishna and Rama may be characterized both as gods and as good heroes. These characters are calm, good-humoured, heroic and are seen in their moods of grace and of valour but never in fear or disgust. In their moods of ferocity and anger, these basically good types assume what is known in the tradition as *raudra rupa*, mood of anger. Thus a character like Bhima assumes *raudra* manifestation when in a state of anger which prompts him to kill Dussasana.

Secondly, there are the anti-heroes and the villains, both human and demon. They represent negative forces and are usually aggressive, treacherous and ferocious. These also can be traced back to Puranic stories and their treatment is more akin to characterization in the *Mahabharata* rather than that in the Sanskrit drama. Kathakali makes a further subdivision of villainous types, because villains and demons can be either kings, gods, or female demons. They may be simply evil, or they may be evil and treacherous and cruel.

Surprisingly enough, the character of the *Vidushaka* known to the Kudiattam of Kerala completely disappeared from Kathakali. Humorous portions of Kathakali are occasionally presented in number in which Hanuman appears. In the story relating to the capture of the royal horse by Lava and Kusa and in the story of the meeting of Bhima with Hanuman in the drama *Kalyana Sougandhikam*, we have some humour without any of the ironical or satirical undertones which were presented by the *vidushaka* in the Kudiattam tradition.

Kathakali tradition also has characters like the half-man half-lion in Narasimha (*Prahlada Charitam*); half-man half-bird in Hamsa (*Nala Charitam*) and, the monkey deity Hanuman. There are a few other characters who cannot justifiably fall into any of the large categories. These include the ordinary humans such as women, *rishis*, children messengers, etc.



Finally, there are the unique persons who live in woods and forests and may be stylized types representing tribal peoples and aborigines. Siva disguised in the form of *Kirata* is portrayed as one such character.

### Make-up

With intricate stylization, it is only appropriate that the character-type should appear on the stage neither as a human being nor as one imitating the actions of men, but rather as one representing certain moods or characteristics of a particular aspect of life in its abstraction. In order to achieve this, the Indian dramatic tradition, along with the other Asian counterparts, has evolved a highly complex and symbolic system of costuming and make-up. The stylized costuming which we know of in other Asian traditions is not seen in any purity in India. However, Kathakali preserves some of the highly symbolic stylization, particularly in make-up.

Specifically, this make-up may remind one of the Chinese opera or the Japanese *Kabuki*. But on a close look, one finds it distinctively Indian. While there is a common hypothesis that certain colours represent certain characteristics and moods still in the actual design of the make-up, there is little in common between the contours of the face in Kathakali and the Chinese opera or the *Kabuki* theatre.

The *Natyasastra* refers to facial make-up many times, it also devotes one complete chapter to *aharyabhinaya* where it considers the symbolism of colour in facial make-up and costumes. As with the *ragas* and *raginis* of the Indian musical system, here also, certain colours are associated with particular moods and sentiments. Normally, light green represents *sringara*, red *raudra* and yellow *adbhuta*. Kathakali follows these basic colour patterns but associations developed a unique system, easily the most intricate technique of facial make-up in India. Its aim is not merely to cover the human face, but rather to transform the actor into a god or a demon. Once the actor has the make-up he is no longer himself, but has been transformed into the character which he is playing. Even before his first stage entrance no one should address the actor by his own name once he has put on the make-up.

The artist who guides this make-up is an important person both at the training stage and also at the performing stage. *Chouttikaran*, as he is known, is a revered teacher who has been through an excruciating training in the art—from drawing designs on a pot and coconut shell to mastering the complexities of preparing his own colours by grinding, soaking, and mixing them to desired consistency. This is important because the make-up is directly related to the character-types.

If the characters are *sattvika*, the basic make-up is green, *Pachcha*. The cheeks, up to the jaw-bone, are covered with a light green paste and the eyes are



elongated to give them a design which can be described as “lotus-eyed”. The forehead has a white pigment and can take different designs depending upon the particular character. Thus Krishna has a different forehead design from that of Arjuna.

The jaw-bone is exaggerated by pasting along it cut-outs either of paper or of *papier-mache*, to give the face enlarged dimensions. With the costume, the make-up transforms the actor from his human proportions to superhuman stature. The make-up (*Chutti*) is a white paste made of ground-rice and lime and it is along the arc of this white paste that the cut of the false chin and jaw are struck.

When these characters assume the mood of ferocity (*raudra*), a large, ferocious moustache in black is drawn on the basic green make-up along the upper lip reaching to the upper cheekbone. The transformation of Bhima from the purely *pachcha* character to the *raudra* Bhima is indicated in this manner.

When there are kings and heroes who could not be described merely as villains or antiheroes, but who may be described as *rajasik* characters such as Ravana, the basic green make-up is broken by red patches. Also, on the basic green make-up, an oval red and white design is made on the nose and on the upper cheek. The upturned moustache is common both to this types, known as *kathi*, and to the earlier *raudra* type of green (*pachcha*), a white blob of pith is attached to the nose which makes the characters seem more fantastic than human.

### Tadi Types

Anti-heroes, villains, demons and some special types in conventional Kathakali receive a make-up called the beard (*Tadi*). Three types of beards are traditional—the red, the black and the white. The red beard is for the evil character mostly involved in destructive deeds. The basic colour scheme of the face is red, with upper portion of the face painted black and the lower portion painted red. The eyes are not elongated to take the lotus shape, but, instead, have a square patch of black collyrium giving them a frightening look. The white paste (*chutti*) is not applied along the natural contours of the jaw-bone. Instead, the paper cut-outs are also square and put out from the line of the nose horizontally on either side of the face. This, together with the elongation of the chin by a flat false beard, gives these characters a very ominous appearance. More often than not, there are two fangs protruding from the lips. With the screams and cries they utter, they succeed in creating an atmosphere of the nether-world on the stage.

The black beards are different. These do not indicate the anti-heroes and the demons, but the aborigines and the off-beat characters like the *Kirata* (Siva disguised as hunter). The basic make-up here is not red but black. On this, there are many fantastic designs in white and red. The black beards are also associated with the characters.

The white beard, known as *veluppu tadi*, indicates the third type of half-human



gods like Hanuman. The basic mock-up is white. These characters are benign, although they can assume ferocious forms. A different category of make-up is seen in characters like the Lion-God (*Narasimha*). The basic make-up of such characters is yellow, representing *adbhuta* or wonder. In the Kathakali tradition, this is known as a variation of the white beard. As a matter of fact this make-up is a class by itself and perhaps one of the most effective make-ups of the Kathakali dance drama.

Other types of characters do not have such elaborate make-up. There is only one basic make-up for them—pink on the face without any attempt at masking. These types are known as the *minukku*; women, brahmins, messengers, *rishis*, all appear in ordinary costumes.

### Mudis

The symbolism of the make-up is highlighted by many types of headgear. These headgears, generally called the *mudis*, are carved either from wood or cane fibre or are made of *papier-mache*. There is a particular cane shaped crown headgear (*mudi*) for Krishna but is also worn by Lava and Kusa and other children and princes of the *Sattvika* type. The other good heroes (*pachcha* characters) wear a more elaborate low conical crown with a small disc. In-set mirrors are characteristic of these *mudis*. The red-bearded characters wear a headdress similar to those noble characters, but the crown is higher, the disc is larger while the villains' and demons' headgears assume huge proportions. A distinctive headgear is designed for characters like Hanuman, Narasimha and Siva disguised as a hunter.

The symbolism which is followed in the make-up and headgears is also carried out in the costume colours worn by the various characters. The *pachcha* characters usually wear a jacket of either purple, blue or yellow colour. The red-beards wear a red jacket and the white-beards wear a white jacket while the scarfs which hang on either side follow the colour patterns set by the make-up. The lower half of the costume of Kathakali dancer is common to all types excepting the *minukku* characters. An attempt is made to enlarge the actor's proportions by using heavily plaited skirts. Beneath this awe-inspiring make-up huge headgear and spectacular costume is a most pliable, lithe, slim and well-trained body.

### The Repertoire

A Kathakali evening begins with the sounding of drums, which play an important part in establishing the proper atmosphere for a performance, since the play is performed outdoors, against the light of a single oil-lamp, the drums call the audience to attention. The playing of the drums (*melappadam*) is followed by devotional number called the *todayam* where one or two characters.



invoke the blessings of the gods. The *todayam* is usually performed behind a curtain held by two stage-hands. After the *todayam* comes a pure *nritya* piece known as the *purappadu*, in which appear two characters either the hero and his consort, or two other *pachcha* characters, or even the five Pandava brothers. The *purappadu* is another introductory dance of invocation and has no mime. The dancer presents a number of pure dance sequences (*kalasams*). The entire technique of Kathakali is exhibited through these cadences. After the *purappadu*, the play or the particular scene of the play chosen for the evening begins.

Very often, before any major character appears, there is the slow revelation of the character from behind the curtain. The character gradually appears as the curtain is lowered. When a powerful character appears for the first time, he stands close behind the curtain and there appears to be a struggle between the character and the curtain. To the accompaniment of the drums and cymbals, the character executes many dance sequences, which are only partially seen by the audience. The curiosity of the audience increases and the suspense is maintained. Then, as if the power of the character were conquering the curtain or vanquishing the stage attendants, the curtain disappears and he appears in his full glory. The play with the curtain is known as the *tiranokku*.

Beyond this point the story unfolds through *nritya*, *natya* and *abhinaya*. The text in Malayalam is closely followed by the performers. It would be perfectly correct to say that the Malayalam plays such as *Nala Charitam*, *Kalyana Sougandhikam*, *Bali Vijayam*, *Ravanasuravadham* and *Sita Swayamvaram*, were written specifically for singing in a Kathakali dance-drama. The passages contain soliloquies of characters or are sometimes highly descriptive to enable the actor to present *abhinaya*. Sometimes, they consist of key words which can give the dancer full opportunity for presenting variations (*sancharibhava*) and sometimes, there are passages of court drama and dialogue on which dramatic climax is built up. The passages sung are interspersed with purely percussive musical accompaniment. Thus, after a *padam* has been sung and the *abhinaya* has been done, the singer stops while the actor goes on to interpret the literary content through gestures to the accompaniment of the percussion instruments. This interpretation is known as the *manodharma* which affords the actor full scope to improvise. During the *manodharma* an imaginative and well-trained actor can hold an audience over one sequence for hours. This is followed by pure *nritya* passages where only the *kalasams* or the dance cadences are executed.

Through a familiar puranic story, familiar music, symbolic make-up, stylized costuming and headgear, the Kathakali dance-drama seeks to evoke a state, a particular *sthayibhava* and a *rasa*. In this respect the Kathakali dance drama is perhaps the only real survivor of the classical tradition of presenting a particular *rasa* as the content of a dramatic performance. This skill has been lost to many of the other Indian theatrical traditions. Although an amalgam of several elements and certainly not an example of the chaste classical tradition, Kathakali is a vital form of theatre which has its roots in classical tradition.



It is an interesting commentary on the complex cultural processes of this country that while assimilating foreign influences and alien cultures, it has continued to maintain a distinctively Indian character in almost all the art forms. The coming of the Arabs, the Dutch and the Portuguese seem to have left its mark on Kathakali, but the fundamental spirit continues to be Indian in character, and the dance-drama has not departed from the ancient aesthetic canons in its objective of evoking a state of being.



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# ORISSI

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Orissi may well claim to be the earliest classical Indian dance style on the basis of archaeological evidence, the most outstanding being the Rani Gupta caves of the second century B. C. in Orissa. Scholars have dated these caves and their carvings to be earlier than the writing of the *Natyasastra*. While there may be some questions about the date of the caves, certainly the reliefs include the first finished example of a dance scene with full orchestration. Whatever may have been the dance style prevalent at that time, it is obvious that the traditions codified in the *Natyasastra* took cognizance of the particular regional style known in eastern India. The *Natyasastra* speaks of regional varieties, one amongst these is the eastern-southern style known as the Odhra Magadha style which can be identified as the earliest precursor of the present Orissi.

The Udayagiri and the Khandagiri caves of Orissa are the first records in stone of the historic period. Although it is not certain that they were contemporary with the compilation of the *Natyasastra*, there is no doubt that Orissa was the home of many kingdoms, Buddhist, Jaina and Shaivite and others, between the second century B. C. and the fifth century A. D. Recent excavations of the sites of Ratnagiri and Lalitagiri have brought forth valuable archaeological evidence which supports the view that dance or the dance image was as popular with the artists of the Buddhist monuments as it was with sculptors of Udayagiri, the Rani Gumpha and the Hathi - Gumpha caves. In some door frames of Lalitagiri appear dance figures in movements and poses which certainly establish a continuity between the dance styles seen in Udayagiri and the later Orissan temples. Although no full dance scenes of the Udayagiri type have come to light from the finds of Ratnagiri and Lalitagiri, there are figures of Buddhist deities such as Marichi and Aparajita, etc. who are depicted in dance pose. The style of dance, despite the difference of themes and cult exhibits a kinship with the sculpture of the dance styles or the sculptural styles found in Sanchi, Amravati and Nagarjunakonda. An affinity in regard to the treatment of the human body is evident. Along side is the evidence in historical chronicles which speak of the prevalence of the dance during this period. Travellers to India such as Huen Tsang referred to the Buddhist Viharas in Orissa. These references are of the general type. The archaeological evidence recently brought forth by Mrs. Debala Mitra reinforces the descriptions in the chronicles. The history of Orissa between the second century B. C. and the ninth century A. D. is an interesting



and complex amalgam of the development of different schools of Buddhism, Jainism and what is today identified as Vajrayan Buddhism or Tantric Buddhism. Eastern India and the Himalayan Kingdom developed or perfected many complex cults and sub-cults of Vajrayan. All these rubbed shoulders with each other before the establishment of major Brahmanical cults namely first Shaivism and then Vaishnavism. Although the Shaivite cults took strong roots in Orissa in the seventh century A.D., their beginnings have to be traced back to the fourth century A.D. almost contemporary with the Gupta sculptures of other regions of India. We encounter here some of the first dance reliefs of the Nataraja. One amongst these (recently recovered from a village of Asanpat in the District of Keonjhar) is of special importance. It is an inscribed image of Shiva with eight arms holding a *veena*, *trishula* and *akshyamala*, a damru with a *pataka* and a *varada hasta*. The inscription in Brahmi characters is ascribed to Shatrubhanja, a king of the Bhanja dynasty who constructed shrines for Shiva. Perhaps this image and the famous Nataraja of Nachna are near contemporary. From the sixth and seventh century onwards there is a massive evidence of dance as part of worship and presumably this dance inspired the sculptors of the early medieval temples of Bhubaneswar. Within 300 years, nearly five hundred temples were constructed, each a jewel of architecture. The sculptures are like inset gems adorning walls, lintels, portals, door jambs and ceilings. One of the oldest surviving temples is Bharatesvara belonging to the sixth century A.D. Although now in ruins, this temple has a single relief which is of great importance for the history of dance in Orissa. As part of Shiva's marriage there is an orchestra and a group of women in a dance composition. A little later in the seventh century was built the beautiful and impressive temple of Parsuramesvara. In the door lintels of this temple appear many scenes of music and dance set vertically and horizontally. Two of these show a group of three dancers, each in a very distinct movement and yet interlocked with each other. The panels in the latticed windows are master compositions of movement arrested in stone. Soon after were built important temples namely the Vaitan Deul and the Sisiresvara. A perfectly balanced and harmoniously built piece of architecture, its walls and lintels are covered every inch with sculptures. Here women peep out from windows, hide behind doors, are intertwined with trees, hold birds, dance on animals and above all there is Durga and Shiva dancing. Judging from the illustrations the sculptural reliefs of the temple of Vaital Deul and the image of Durga as Mahishasuramardini, now disconnected but kept in the centre of the temple, it would appear that by the eighth century, dance had already achieved a very distinctive stylisation in Orissa. Both the panels of Parasuramesvara as also Vaital Deul exhibit Orissan school not only of sculpture but also of dance. Although the *ardhamandali* is basic, it is not identical with the *ardhamandali* of the temples of South India or North India. The deflection of the hip and the *tribhanga* is basic to each of these figures. Although the sculpture reliefs of the *salabhanjikas* are similar to what we find in other parts of India in terms of their themes and motifs, the sculptural style as also the movements captured is distinctively Orissan. These are masterpieces in stone, perfect like a beautifully



composed poem. The Muktesvara temple, like the Parasuramesvara and the Vaital Deul temples, is a masterpiece for its balance and proportion. Here also, there are a host of *nayikas* and *nayikas* on the walls of the temples. Outstanding amongst all their reliefs are two on the ceiling. In one, there is Ganesha in a dancing pose and in another a woman surrounded by a full orchestra. The sculptor captures a most dynamic movement of dance in limited physical space. The movement of perfectly balanced recital is impressive for its dance figures. The story continues in the other temples of Bhubaneswar especially the most exquisitely carved Raja-Rani temple and the impressive grand temple, the *Lingaraj*. In these, there is a refining of techniques of execution of the movements of the dance which had begun charmingly in the first three temples mentioned. Here too, there is an abundance of dance sculpture. There are the *ganas* of dance: there are the standing figures of women, bursting out of stone, pulsating with rhythm. There are the flying figures—the *gandharvas* and the *apsaras*. There are the full groups of dancers and there is the *Tandava* of Lord Shiva. A full and systematic documentation of all this corpus of sculptural evidence in Orissa is clear proof of not only the permeation of the Shaivite cults including that of Lakulisa but also of a very self-conscious understanding of the movement of the dance. No matter where you look, there is a dancer or a group of dancers who attract, allure and charm you. The wide variety of the dance image and the deities specially those of Ganesha, Devi and Nataraja, is impressive. Some of these compare favourably with the depiction of the *Tandava* of the dance in Ellora and elsewhere. Far off in the Aurangabad caves and in Ellora, the concept of Siva's *Tandava* had inspired sculptors to make massive reliefs. In Orissa, in the temples of Bhubaneswar subscribing to the Shaivite cult there is an equally impressive array of the deity in the movement of the dance. Equally important from the point of view of the precise delineation of movement, specially the position (*sthanas*), the primary movement (*charis*) and the cadences of movements (*karanas*) described in the *Natyasastra* are those of Kama or Devi. Here we find a prolific use of the extended leg (*alidha*) or the uplifted leg of the *apakranta* and of course the most popular of them all the *urdhvajanu*. There are a few examples also of the *bhujanga trasita*. This sculptural evidence of dance in the temples of Bhubaneswar belonging to the seventh, eighth, ninth and tenth centuries almost comes to a close around the eleventh and twelfth centuries when changes take place in Orissa.

Now temples are dedicated to Vishnu. No matter how complex the beginning may have been, it is clear that by the eleventh century A.D., there was the emergence of a Vaishnavite cult distinctive to Orissa. Chodagandeva, a most illustrious ruler, began the construction of the temple of Jagannath some time between the second half of the eleventh century and the beginning of the twelfth century. He was followed by Anangabhimadev. Between these two rulers was built the temple of Jagannath, a unique synthesis of all that had preceded in Orissa including the tribal cults. Cumulatively, Jagannath temple at Puri was not the only temple but it was the beginning of a new cultural movement in



India. No part of India remained unaffected by all that Jagannath temple stood for. The temple itself was outstanding in its architectural plan, its sculptural reliefs and its special hall of the dance called the *Nat Mandir*.

Although no definite date can be conclusively ascribed regarding the practice of dance as an indispensable part of the ritual of the worship or the daily routine, it is clear from chronicle records of the temple called *Mandal Panji* that it was certainly co-terminus with the Jagannath cult. From the records it is learnt that *Devadasis* were attached to the temples as elsewhere in India especially in Kashmir, Bengal, Saurashtra, Rajasthan and, of course, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Many inscriptions speak of the dancers who were dedicated to the deity Siva or Vishnu and their socio economic organisation. This wide prevalence of temple dancing and its technique, no doubt, inspired and influenced the carving of sculptural reliefs.

All these temples between the seventh century A.D. and the twelfth century A.D. are evidence of an inner understanding of dance and an attempt to arrest moments of dynamic movement rather than an execution of a static pose. The temple of Konarak crystallises all these trends into a magnificent and stupendous edifice. Built round the middle of the thirteenth century, here was a masterpiece of architectural design and an excellence in sculptural relief. Conceived as a chariot or *ratha* on 24 wheels dedicated to *Surya* (Sun), the temple reverberates with the movement of the dance whether in relief or around the main shrine or the *Jagmohan* or the *Bhogmandap* and most of all *Nat Mandir*. In the *Vaital Deul* women in beautiful poses of *charis* peep through doors or grills, in *Raja Rani* temple they pulsate with life emerging from stone almost like detached figures, in Konarak they command the horizon as free standing sculpture. Monumental figures of musicians and dancers, of flute and drum players dance as if in the sky and overlook the space of the earth and reach the ocean. These massive free standing sculptures are in great contrast to the small and delicate work of the dancers who are carved on the pillars of the *Nat Mandir*. The free standing dancers on the roof of the *Jagmohan* look at free space; the carved dancers of the *Nat Mandir* look at space circumscribed as if either they or their companions would come to life and commence a dance. The pillars punctuate the *Nat Mandir*, the dancers in stone cling to the pillars almost ready to emerge. The horizontal panels seem as they were marginal figures of a manuscript. Together hundreds or thousands of these diminutive dancers make an orchestration which leaves no spectator untouched or unmoved, with the silent harmony it vibrates.

This then is the sculptural heritage of dance in Orissa with massive and diminutive dancers, some rough and bold, others delicate and intricate. All these complement each other presenting a world of movement unparallel even in Indian sculptural history. The movement of these dancers may or may not be the self-conscious delineation of the movement of the *karnas* as in the case of the



three South Indian temples mentioned in the context of the Bharatanatyam i.e. Brihadesvara, Sarangapani and Chidambaram, but they are certainly a sensitive recreation in stone of the movement of dance. Also at no time they can be mistaken for anything but an Orissi style of dance.

The Parasurameswar Temple (eighth century), as has been mentioned above, has a number of sculptures in postures of the *Tandava* dance. Later temples, such as the Vaital Deul, also have reliefs of Nataraja. The early medieval temples, especially the Raja Rani Temple, contain on their walls many dance figures; indeed, these figures can be classified into several categories. It has been suggested by some scholars that the sculptors of these medieval temples, from the eleventh century to the thirteenth century, were merely trying to create an impression of the rhythms of dance and were not illustrating the actual movements of dance. A close scrutiny, however, reveals that the sculptor was knowledgeable person illustrating chapters of the *Natyasastra*, even if in a markedly local style. Without sacrificing the characteristic features of the region, the sculptor demonstrates exquisitely how accurately a dance pose or a *chari* can be wrought in stone. In these sculptures, we find portrayed the *charis* which have been discussed in the *Natyasastra* (Chapter IX). We also find that these temple illustrations of the most intricate movements are described in the chapter on the *Karanas* (Chapter IV). By the time of the Konarak Temple, the style had been set and a very distinctive method of body manipulation is apparent .

### Manuscript Evidence

Due to many momentous historical developments in Orissa, although the Jagannath Temple continued to be a great centre of many Vaishnavite Cults, there was little architectural activity or certainly not at the level at which we find it either between the eighth and tenth century A D. or the eleventh and thirteenth century. It would appear that from the fifteenth century onwards, the artists canalised their energies into the writing of manuscripts, the illustrations of manuscripts and the paintings on the walls of temples. Here, as elsewhere, dance is a central preoccupation. It is from these earliest illustrated manuscripts of Orissa and the wall paintings in some of these temples that we realise that a very special style of dance must have been the experience of the artist. The *ardhamandali*, the *tribhanga*, the *chauka* are as popular here as they were in the sculptural reliefs. Alongside, of course, we know that Chaitanya made Puri his home and pilgrims thronged to Puri from all parts of India. Dancers came from Andhra and Gujarat *Devadasis* called *Maharis* were enlisted for the worship. Many texts of dance were written: all these were profusely illustrated. An examination of the illustrations of the manuscripts of Orissa whether these deal with architecture or sculpture or music or dance or are based on the poetic composition of Jayadeva such as the *Gita Govinda* or are illustrations of the *Amru Shatak* or *Usha Parinayam*, shows that these are rich in the motif of the dance.



A comprehensive study of the illustrations of dance in Orissan manuscripts reveals the great fascination of the art for both the writer and the painter.

Some of these manuscripts deal distinctively only with dance. Chief amongst these is the *Abhinaya Chandrika* of Maheshvara Mahapatra. This is a detailed study of the various movements of the feet, hands, the standing postures, the movement and the dance repertoire. Included in these illustrations is the clear depictions of some of the Karanas which can be grouped together as acrobatic *karanas* especially such as the *saktasya*, *chakramandala*, *gangavataran*. Also among these is the depiction of the movements described in the *Natyasastra* as the *Vishnu Kranta*, *Vrichika Kutila*. In these illustrations, there is a continuation of the style of dancing which we observed in the dance reliefs of the *Nat Mandir* of Konarak. The illustrated manuscripts of Orissan which deal With Orissan architecture and sculpture are also filled with figures of dance. Most important amongst these texts is the illustrated manuscript *Shilpaprakasha*. Although the present manuscript may be a copy or a recent reconstruction, its contents certainly point at an earlier tradition. Here a full analysis is made of the manner in which the *salabhanjikas* or the feminine figures called the *alasa kanyas* are to be carved in the temple. Many subdivisions are made, the architecture design is indicated both for the single female figures as also of the Nataraja called the *Natambar*. The illustrations of the *Shilpaprakasha* reinforce the evidence of sculptures in the temple. Quite obviously, there was a very close interaction between the designers, the executors, the theoreticians of dance and sculpture, the creative artists, poets, sculptors, painters and dancers.

One other major source of evidence of the prevalence of Orissi dance or the precursors of the style which we may call Orissi, comes from a rather very unexpected source. These are the marginal figures of dancers in the Jain manuscripts especially the *Kalpasutra* and *Kalkacharya Kathas*. Although executed in Gurajat, these marginal figures show women in poses and movements which are distinctive to Orissi and are not seen in other styles of Indian dancing. In a famous illustrated manuscript of the *Kalpasutra* belonging to the fifteenth century i.e. the *Devasanpada Kalpasutra* as also in another belonging to Jamnagar dated 1501, there is a prolific depiction of the *samapada*, the *tribhangi* and the *chauka*. i.e. the outspread grand plie position of Orissi dance. It is interesting to note that these manuscripts from Gujarat in western India should have captured a style of dance, which was obviously practised and popular in the easternmost part of India. However, when evidence of these manuscripts is correlated with the other chronicler evidence especially trade and pilgrimage routes, both from the Jagannath Temple as also the temples of Western India, the phenomenon is not strange. From all these, one gathers that there was a great deal of mobility between the west and the east. Many migrations took place and according to some historians, there were groups of dancers who were brought to Puri from Gujarat as also from Andhra.

In Orissa itself, there continued to be the depiction of the dance in Orissan



manuscripts both in respect of the technique of the dance as also illustrations of *kavya* and *nataka* until the nineteenth century.

### Textual Evidence

The evidence of dance through sculptural reliefs and illustrated manuscripts (i.e. the pictorial evidence) is further supported by evidence which is available in texts on music and dance which were written in Orissa. We have already referred to the manuscript of *Abhinaya Chandrika*. In addition, there are other texts (some published and some unpublished) which were written in Orissa and which are convincing proof of the dialogue and interdependence of theory and practice. An important text of uncertain date is the *Sangitanarayan* by Narayan Dev Gajapati. One section of the text called *nritya khand* deals with the dance. It follows the tradition of *Sangitaratnakara*. It analyses the different *angas* and *upangas*: it first delineates the movements and then their usage. It speaks of the different types of eye and face movements and includes a list of positions in place i. e. *sthana*, the primary movement of the lower limbs i. e. the *charis*; the cadence of movements i.e. the *karanas* and longer cadences of movement called the *mandalas* and the *angaharas*. The writer finally also attempts a notation of some Sanskrit and Oriya poems and indicates the *raga* and *tala*. A close analysis of this *nritya khand* i. e. the chapter on dance in the *Sangitanarayan* again convinces us of an intra-regional dialogue. The tradition of *Sangitaratnakara* must undoubtedly have travelled to Orissa so as to enable the writer of *Sangitanarayan* to base his work on the *Sangitaratnakara*. There is little evidence in this text, however, of a clear identification of a style of dance which we can call Orissi. There are other texts, such as the *Nritya Kaumudi* and the *Natya Manorama* by Raghunath Rath attributed to the eighteenth century. This text describes a variety of dance; it also lists the macro and the micro movements such as the *angas* and the *upangas*. The text although interesting, is not very significant. It is important for its detailed list and references to other textual material, despite the fact that it throws very little light on the actual practice of the dance. More important is the manuscript of the *Abhinaya Darpana* of Yadunath Sinha, perhaps written some time again in the seventeenth or eighteenth century. Here many more technicalities are mentioned. A reading of the text reveals that the writer was acquainted with Bharata's *Natyasastra* and was also acquainted with the practice of the dance in Orissa. There is another source of evidence in regard to dance in the manuscripts of Orissa; these are the manuscripts which deal with the dance of Shiva. Many manuscripts describe in detail the *Tandava* of Siva, speaking not only of the theme of the *Tandava* i.e. *Ananda Sandhya* etc. but also describing in detail the manner in which the *Tandava* is to be executed. Some of these manuscripts do not follow the *Natyasastra*; instead they adhere to the tradition of the *Saudhikagamas*. Again it is evident that there was an interchange between Orissa and South India because many of the descriptions of the *Tandavas* are reminiscent of the descriptions which we come across in the South Indian *agamas*.



### Historical Chronicles

Although we have made passing references to the rich body of the historical chronicles available in Orissa, it is necessary to add that the *Madal Panji* i. e. the drum chronicles of the temple of Puri is the richest storehouse for reconstructing the socio economic status of the temple dancers, the different categories of men and women dancers. There are vivid descriptions of the occasion, time, and the ritual practices of the temple where dance was an essential part of the worship. Apart from the *Madal Panji* there are other historical records and chronicles which enable us to know that dance was an important activity both of the temple milieu as also the court milieu Orissa. From this material two things are clear; one that there were the temple dancers called the *maharis* who danced inside the centre and outside the shrine; the first group was known as the *Bheetar Gaonis* and the other *Bahar Gaonis*. Besides, there were the Gopipuas or the boy dancers in women's garb who danced outside the temple. This tradition continued until the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century.

### Creative Literature

The evidence of sculpture, painting, chronicles, textual writing i. e. the manuals and the treatises of technique has to be supplemented with a brief mention of Orissan literature especially poetry and drama. Creative works allude to dance in many ways. These references range from the descriptions of the dance in early works of Orissan literature such as the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, particularly the Oriya *Mahabharata* of Saral Das written in the fifteenth century, the *Dandi Ramayana*, written by Balaram Das in the sixteenth century and the *Niladri Mahodaya* of Lokanath Vidyadhara of the seventeenth century. Many festivals and dramatic recitals are mentioned here. More important than the series of plays are the lyrics which are composed by great writers of Orissa ranging from Ramanand Rai to Upendra Bhanjadev, Kavi Surya, Baladev Rath and others. Most of this writing i.e. the dramatic works, the narrative epic, the Chautisa couplets, of stanzas which begin with one of 34 consonants in consecutive order belonging to the fifteenth, sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, refer to dance.

One may well ask the question what was the situation of both poetry and literature as also the position of the dance prior to this. Not many literary works survive of the Shaivite tradition of Orissa that belong to the eighth to the eleventh centuries. The real history begins with the composition of the greatest work of Sanskrit poetry, namely the *Gita Govinda*. Although scholars will continue to debate whether Jayadeva came from Orissa or Bengal, there is no doubt that the impact of the *Gita Govinda* was not only instantaneous but deep and powerful in Orissa. It is significant to remember that the composition of the *Gita Govinda* was almost contemporary with the construction of the Jagannath temple. Wherever it was written, soon after its composition, there appeared commentaries, transcriptions, translations and imitations of the *Gita Govinda* in Orissa.



Some of the first commentaries on this great poem were written in Orissa. Most important was the acceptance of this poem as a text for worship in the Jagannath temple. The kings of Orissa enjoined that the worship to the Lord will be done through the singing of the *Gita Govinda*. Many stories and legends are prevalent about the attempt made by some kings to replace the singing of the *Gita Govinda* by an imitation. The legends go on to narrate how the Lord refused to accept the imitation and how the singing of the *Gita Govinda* was once again firmly established as part of temple worship. An important Oriya inscription of 1499 A.D. of Pratap Rudradev clearly mentions that the *Gita Govinda* alone would be sung at the time of the Bhoga ceremony. Some scholars have questioned the use of the word *Bada Thakur*. While one may not go into the details of this controversy, it is clear that no controversies could have arisen unless the original was popular. About the same time the great saint Shri Chaitanya made Puri his home. It was perhaps through him that this poem received another lease of life. He identified himself with Radha or the Sakhi and the *Gita Govinda* was transformed from a pure love poem or a devotional poem to a theological text. The disciples of Chaitanya were zealous missionaries who travelled to all parts of India and gave a new doctrinal turn to the *Gita Govinda*. Many kings and nobles, warriors and ministers were converted to this cult, gave up their affluent life and became devotees and missionaries. One amongst these was Ramananda Rai, who became a devout worshipper of Jagannath. According to the *Chaitanya Charitamrita*, he even taught *abhinaya* to the *devadasis* or the *maharis*. He was also an author of an important play called *Jagannath Vallabh Nataka*. This *Nataka* or drama was presented in the precincts of the temple. There were others who followed, such as the writer who called himself Jayadeva-II. He wrote a work called the *Piyush Lahari*. This was patterned on the *Gita Govinda* but did not restrict itself to three characters—Krishna, Radha and the *Sakhi*. The drama was presented outside the temple. The tradition of the singing of the *Gita Govinda*, the *abhinaya* to the *Gita Govinda*, the dramatic version to the *Gita Govinda* continued in Orissa for many centuries. Alongside was the writing of plays such as the *Parsuram Vijaya* by the King Kapilendra Deva of the fourteenth century. All these were also performed in and around the temple. Other poets and lyrical writers followed. Outstanding amongst these was Upendra Bhanjadeo. His songs were popular throughout the countryside and his songs were sung by all. It is not known whether *abhinaya* was performed to them but it is known that Upendra Bhanjadev's lyrical creations permeated Orissan society at all levels. Other composers appeared on the scene; these were Kavi Surya Baladev Rath Gopal Krishna Pattanayak and Banmalidas. While Kavi Surya's verses are full of musical melody lilting rhythms, Gopal Krishna's diction is as delicate as effective and Banmali's poems are full of devotion. Kavi Surya Baldev Rath like the poet musicians of South India of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, adorned the courts of the kings, wrote poetry which was sometimes heroic, at other times delicately sensuous and colourful but always full of technical excellence. A real human experience bursts out in his poems where at one level, it is the love of Radha and Krishna, on other it is the human



love of man and woman. His champu songs were also equally popular. They had vigour, a touch of wit and humour and he transformed the divine story of the love of Radha and Krishna into a more human level. The poems can be compared to the *Padams* and *Javalies* of South India where also double and triple meanings are inherent. Also like the composition of the South Indian poets, each of these songs can be set to a musical melody and can be danced. The verbal imagery has immense potential for being rendered kinetically. Gopal Krishna Pattanayak had greater poetic sensitivity and as a devout Vaishnav, he composed his lyrics as offerings to the Lord. He describes the entire life of Lord Krishna from childhood to adolescence. He is as enchanted with the image of the mother Yashodha as the poets of South India, Dikshitar, Kshetrappa and others. Unlike Upendra Bhanjdev, he always remains at a high spiritual level because the love of Radha and Krishna for him is the love of the primordial *sakhi*, the woman of the Lord. His imagery, his diction, his simple spontaneous manner endeared him to the dancers once again. This became a rich source of the poetic material for the presentation of Orissi dance. Banamali was like his predecessors but even more of a devotee. He is known to have become a *sanyasi* and many legends are prevalent about his visions, the experiences he had with the Lord. Banamali's songs are tight, compact, almost like aphorism. They too are both sung and danced. This tradition of the compositions of the lyrical poetry of the stanzic words called the *chautisa*, the dramatic works and the singing of the *Gita Govinda*, both in the original Sanskrit and in its several Oriya translations continued well into the nineteenth century.

It will be clear from the above, that Orissi or what we recognise as Orissi has a rich sustained history. We have not mentioned here the annual seasonal cycle of festivities in and around the Jagannath Temple which also provided the opportunity for the performance of music and dance. As elsewhere in India, but of universal popularity, were the festivals of the Dol Jatra, the Rath Jatra, the Janmashtami and many others. Each provided an occasion for a different type of presentation of music and dance. One last but most enduring stream needs to be mentioned in this context. This is the rich and vibrant tradition of tribal dancing in many parts of Orissa. The tribes, particularly the Savaras, had an important role to play in the Jagannath cult. They were not great musicians or dancers but dance was very much part of their life style. These constituted the substratum on which all else was built. In rural Orissa were many dance forms known to many communities. Both currents were strong. At no time was the link between these and dance associated with the temples lost. There was finally yet another stream which is relevant for tracing the evolution of Orissi. This was the tradition of the martial dancers, the pikes, the chadiya dancers. As in the case of Kerala and as we shall see in the case of Manipur, the techniques of attack and defence assumed an artistic stylisation which at certain moments did not distinguish it from dance. The pike and the other martial dances of the militia crystallized into what we recognise as *mayurabhanja* today. And last, there was the strong tradition of Orissa as in Kerala of acrobatics. Artistic acrobatic



movements of gymnastics were executed by young boys and girls. In fact, this was the continuation of the tradition described in the *Natyasastra* under the category of the *Karnas* such as *Chakramandala*, *Gangavatarana* and *Saktasya* etc. Had this tradition not been there, we would not have found the illustrations of these in movements in temple sculpture and manuscript illustrations relating to Orissi dance. All these multiple streams and the interaction of literature, sculpture, painting and music, religious and tribal, rural and temple milieu were determining factors. From these many strands presumably emerged a dance style, a style which could be distinguished from any other but a style which was not restricted only to the temples or what one may call a sophisticated milieu of the courts. It was connected to the world outside, the country life, to tribal forms, to martial techniques, to dramatic performances, to operas, and perhaps even the puppet plays. It was also equally strongly inspired by the rich body of poetry and literature. Altogether, it was both worship within the temple and art and entertainment immediately outside the temple.

What we recognise the Orissi dance today, is an attempt at reconstruction of a dance form from all these fragments of the *Maharis* tradition of the *Gotipoua* tradition, of the *Bandhanritya* tradition of the martial arts and *Chhau* tradition known to Orissa, and the inspiration drawn from the sculptural relief and pictorial image. Thus on one level, Orissi is perhaps the oldest because of the sculptural evidence, on another level, it is the youngest. because its revival or its neoclassical format emerged only in the 1950s of this century. After lying dormant or being fragmented or certainly underground for sixty years or may be a hundred, it arose again as a new whole. The story of the reconstruction of Orissi in Independent India is parallel to the story of the reconstruction of the Bharatanatyam or the revival of the Bharatanatyam in the 30s of this century. It is also parallel to the new lease of life which was given to Kathakali by the efforts of Poet Vallathol in Kerala. In what is recognised as the art dance of Orissi, cognizance must be taken of this historical background. Often people mistake the full recital on the stage as an authentic unbroken continuation of an ancient past. In fact, it is the reconstruction of the fragments available from different periods and millieus as also the immediate and remote past.

### The Technique

Despite all these knotty questions relating to Orissi, there is no doubt whatsoever of its clearly defined technique. In technique, Orissi dance follows the basic principles of the *Natyasastra* tradition and the methodologies of movement delineation described in the *Silpasastras* of Orissa such as the *Silpaprakasha* and the *Silpasarani*. It treats the human body in terms of the three *bhargas* along which deflections of the head, torso and hips can take place. The body is divided into two equal halves and the technique is built up on the principle of an unequal division of weight and the shift of weight from one foot to the other. Units of movement of the head, the torso, or the hips and the knees,



are as important here as in the other classical styles of Indian dancing. The characteristic feature of this dance style is a hip deflection which is almost a taboo to other classical forms. The *dvibhanga* which is seen occasionally in Bharatanatyam, is greatly emphasized here. The *tribhanga* which is rarely seen in other classical forms, is one of the most typical poses of Orissi dancing. The *tribhanga* of the Nataraja figure in South India is evolved by one half of lower body remaining static along the central plumb line while the other leg usually crosses the first as in the *karanas* of the *bhujangatrasita* variety. The half of the body from the torso upwards deflects in the opposite direction with the head or neck providing the third deflection. In Orissi, the *tribhanga*, is achieved by a sharp deflection of the hip from the horizontal *Kati sutra*, an opposite deflection of the torso, and the head deflecting to the same side as the hip. What is known as the *natavara bhangi* in Orissi dancing is the familiar *tribhanga* of the Indian sculptural tradition.

Foot contacts are similar to those in Bharatanatyam employing both the flat and the toe-heel contacts. The toe touching the ground (*kunchita*) and the heel stamping the ground (*anchita*) foot positions of the *Natyasastra* are used repeatedly. There is, however, a rare use of the combined toe-heel movement characteristic of Bharatanatyam in the kuditta mitta sequences. Rather, there are extremely complex rhythmic sequences based on the use only of the heel. These movements of the *anchita* foot known as *gothi* in Orissa, are distinctive to that style. Apart from these differences in the manner of foot contact i. e. the use of the toe, the use of both heel and a comparative absence of the toe heel movement, there is also a difference in the methodology of using knees in Orissi dances. On account of the deflection of hip in *tribhanga* position of the knees is not in a complete outturned symmetry. The lower limbs are not identical to the *ardhamandali* or *ukkarmandali* of Bharatanatyam. While one knee bends somewhat to the front and the toe of the foot faces the front, the other knee is outturned and the toes point. This is closest to the *Vaisakha sthana* of the *Natyasastra*. The heels of both feet, however, meet. In contrast to Bharatanatyam, the torso is bent to the other side, so that while there is a terseness of the lower half, there is a liquid lyrical flow of the upper body. The torso is used in two sections, the upper and the lower. It is not used as one unit as in Bharatanatyam. It is also not used completely as a figure of 8 as in Manipuri. This manner of using the torso gives Orissi a distinctive kinetic style. The three main positions from which movement emerges in Orissi are first the *Samapada* i.e. the standing equilibrated equivocated erect position without any kind of a suggestion of a frontal bend as seen in South Indian sculpture or Bharatanatyam, the second is the *tribhanga* which we have described. The third and the most important in a way is the *chauka* equivalent to the *mandalasthana* of the *Natyasastra* terminology. Here the heels face the centre, the toes point outwards and there is a distance of about two feet between the two heels. The knees are out-turned, the thighs are bent. This is akin to the perfect grand plie of Western ballet. This *chanka* can be distinguished from the *mandalasthana* which is the



beginning position of a Kathakali dance on account of the manner of the foot contact. The Kathakali dancer rests his weight on the sides of the sole of the feet: the Orissi dancer places the feet flat with the entire sole in contact with the ground. The square is the basic geometrical motif here, and from the square emerge other movements whether they are half-circles, semi-circles or partial figures of 8.

### Movement Patterns

From these basic positions, the movement technique is developed. There can be the possibility of walking in space, in different directions, in different manner and at different levels. A set of terms in the Orissan text which are only partially followed in practice refer to the manner of covering space. The most characteristic amongst these is the semicircular walk or the covering of space by one leg more specifically the calf in semicircles, returning back to centre. The other half of the body is static. The same is repeated by other foot or leg. This is known as the *Minadandi* i. e. covering space like a fish. There is then the manner of covering space in circles, half-circles, semi-circles, and concentric circles. This is known as *ghera*. The *ghera* is somewhat akin to the *chakra* of Kathak but not quite identical. From the *tribhanga* positions emerge another group of movement. Again, one half of the body is kept static along the vertical median, one knee continues to be bent and the other leg is either extended to the side or to the front or to the back. It can cross the static foot, at the back or the front: it can be elevated at different levels and it can be totally extended at the back with the knee bending or calf and thigh in a straight line. Through a sitting or a kneeling position, another group of movements emerge. The most characteristic amongst these is the extension of one leg to the side or to the back, while one foot and knee are in contact with the ground. These movements arise out of the sitting position known by the generic term *baitha*. Another group of movements emerge out of basic position of the *chauka* or the *mandalasthana*. Here either movement can be in place i. e. the feet can be static and only the torso can move or a complete pirouette can be executed holding the *chauka* position. Weight rests on the bent leg and the free leg executes a pirouette. .

The Orissa texts specially the *Abhinaya Chandrika* mention other types of movements . Some are seen and practised, others have become obsolete. One group amongst these is the group of movements called the *charis*. Perhaps the *charis* of the *Natyasastra* tradition and the *charis* described in the *Silpasastras* are nowhere seen so clearly and concretely as in Orissi technique. The Orissi technique has developed many single leg movements called the *ek pada chari* or using both legs or the feet called the *dvipada charis* and innumerable other ways of depicting the pose which can be seen in the sculptural reliefs in the Orissan temples. The *Silpaprakasha* mentions 16 types of the *alasa kanyas*, those that are indolent, those who hold lotuses, those who hold mirrors in their hands, those wearing *ketki* flowers, those playing on the



drums, those who hold drums, those holding a child, or a fly whisk. In the contemporary Orissi technique, many of these sculptural poses are repeated or recreated. The dancer controls her body in the manner in which the sculpture pose is held for a split second only to get back into a series of movements termed (as the *bhramais* are equally important). The sculptural quality of Orissi dance is dependent on perfect execution of these *charis*. Another group of movements termed as *bhramaris* are equally important. These are the spins or the pirouettes. Pirouettes can be executed in the *tribhanga* position, or the *chauka*, both clockwise, and anti-clockwise and of course they can certainly be executed in the standing position. In short, pirouettes also emerge from the three basic positions of the *samapada*, the *tribhangi* and the *chauka*. There are many beautiful names for the pirouettes depending upon the foot contact in the initial position or the final movement or the level at which the knee is elevated or the direction which the pirouette is made. There is the simple *bhramari*, a *bhramari* with a jump therefore called an *ut-pluta bhramari* or an anti-clockwise pirouette called *viparita bhramari*. There is also the *bhramari* called the *antar bhramari*. Here one foot touches the knee of the other leg and a pirouette is executed. The movement patterns of Orissi dance emerges from the positions, the manner of covering space and the method of executing the *bhramaris*. .

There are then the group of movements which may be called elevations, jumps or *utpluta*. There is whole group of movements in Orissi dance where jumps and hops are suggested and there is a lack of contact with the ground. .

Besides, these categories of primary movements and the manner of executing them, there are the sculptural poses which are contained within the dance techniques. From the *tribhanga* can emerge many sculptural poses which have been given different names some suggesting the types of heroines i.e. *nayikas* others suggesting the type of movement i.e. half-bent, full-bent, etc. and yet others suggesting an approach or mood such as *nivedana*. None of these can be identified as with the *Karanas* of the *Natyasastra* because they are largely descriptions of positions of place and direction of space. These sequences of movement in Orissi dancing are called *bhangis* or sometimes the *thais*. .

*Hastas*: While Orissi dance like Bharatanatyam and Kathakali uses a variety of hand gestures both in its technique of pure dance (*nritya*) as also *abhinaya*, there are many significant departures from the tradition of the *Natyasastra* and the *Abhinaya Darpana*. Many new names have been given to the same hand gestures such as the *pataka* of the *Abhinaya Darpana*, the *tripataka* in Kathakali and *dhvaja* in Orissi. The *ardha pataka* with two fingers extended and two infolded is called the *danda*. The *kataka* i. e. where the index finger is held over the thumb and other fingers are extended, is called the *ankush*: many more departures can be identified. However, most of the *hastas* despite the difference in names, belong to *Natyasastra*, the *Sangitaratnakara* and the *Abhinaya Darpana*. A rich vocabulary of technique emerges from this highly codified



system of the movement of feet, knees, torso, neck, head, arms, wrists and hands. Further complexity is added into the dance style by exploring quick change of levels which is not known normally either in Bharatanatyam or in Kathakali.

The smallest unit of movement in Orissi is the *khandi*'. The *khandi* is the beginning of movement from either the standing position in the *samapada* or the *tribhangi* or the *chauka*. Normally it is from the *samapada* or the *tribhangi*. As in the case of Bharatanatyam here also the dancer begins her practice by executing foot contacts right and left and through the manipulation of equally distributed weight as also unequal weight. These very small clusters of movements invariably begin with a static position and return back to the static position. Normally, movements are executed first to the right and then to the left. The dancer is taught to hold one half of her body static and to move the other half either through the leg extension or leg contractions or through crossing front or back. Later each movement is practised by relating to rhythm effort, strong or soft. They are first executed in place always bearing in mind the central axis (the vertical median) and distribution of weight. Next the space is explored. The *khandhs* are primary movements beginning with categories, place, exploring space in all directions. Some are based only on the *samapada* and *tribhanga*. Others combine *samapada*, *tribhanga* and the *chauka*. All are executed to the accompaniment of mnemonics called *ukkatta* comparable to the *bols* of Kathak and *solukatta* of Bharatanatyam. Later they are executed in a given metrical cycle of four, five, six, seven, eight or nine beats. Further refinement is brought into it by dividing say an eight beat cycle into different segments. There can be 4, 2 and 2; or 3, 3 and 2; or 3, 4 and 1. Each time a new movement unit emerges. *Arasas* is the next unit comprising *khandis* comparable to the formation of simple sentences through a combination of words. The student finally learns how to use the phrases in a full line of composition in varying permutations and combinations. The *arasas* can be enlarged like the *Ashtakalasam* of Kathakali or the *tirmanam* of the Bharatanatyam. The principle is the same, beginning with the smallest unit, combinations are made of words and phrases and then sentences: all is contained within the periphery or parameters of the metrical cycle. .

The *nritya* technique of Orissa rests for its strength on a complete mastery over the full gamut of the *khandis* and *arasas* which can then be used in sequences of the dance called the *belis* and the *palis*. The *belis* are longer sections of *nritya* and the *palis* are the finale sequences also in triplets as in the case of the other dance styles. The dancer has to master various aspects of the *nritya* technique comprising the static positions, the sculptural poses, the manner of covering space and has known how to manipulate the metrical cycle through the articulation of the neck, torso and the movement of the lower limbs and to cover space in different directions and to move along straight lines, diagonals, figures of eight and spirals and to shift weight and play with levels. Later she is also



taught to control energy and to play with movement which flows out of body and at other times flows into the body. The juxtaposition of strong and soft movements expanding and contracting, enlarging and dwarfing is characteristic. Like Manipuri, Orissi gives the impression of a soft lyrical style, highly sensuous in form but in fact it is rigorous and challenging for anyone who wishes to execute it with control and precision. The balance of stasis and dynamics is at the core of this style as others.

### The Repertoire

The repertoire of Orissi can also be divided into the two broad categories of *nritta* and *abhinaya* and *tandava* and *lasya*. In fact, this is the standard pan-Indian format for the dance especially those which we call the classical forms. In one group of numbers, the dancer executes movements either only to the mnemonics i. e. the *bols* or the *ukuttas*, recited by the mridangist or to a melodic line as in the case of South Indian jatisvara or to a more complex solfa passage or melodic composition like the *tarana* of Hindustani music or *tillana* of South India or can render through mime (*abhinaya*) a piece of poetry set to music in a special metrical cycle. In Orissi, the melodic compositions are the *pallavis* sung in a typical orissi style: the poetry is drawn from Sanskrit and Oriya. .

Whatever may have been the beginnings of the Orissi dance or the nature of the repertoire for dance performance within or without the temple, it is clear that the number called *bhumipranama* was first number. The present format of Orissi may be attributed to the pioneers of the reconstruction of odem. The sequences of numbers of Orissi dance may not have been in vogue earlier. At the present moment, the beginning of all Orissi dance recitals is with the *bhumipranama* obeisance to one's chosen deity. Often this deity is the Vighnaraja or Ganesha. A line of poetry is set to music, some parts of its are in pure dance and others are in mime and interpreted through gestures. Both the *bhumipranama* or the *Vighnaraja* number are essential because without them there may not be success of the performance. The *Vighnaraja puja* or the *Vighnaraja sloka* is followed by another number; this time of a pure *nritta* number called *batu*. The *batu* is mentioned in the *Abhinaya Chandrika* and is perhaps a dance number of some antiquity. In some ways, this is the most difficult number of this style as it introduces the full gamut of the *nritta* technique. The dancer begins in the *chauka* position in a slow tempo: gradually she works through a series of intricate *charis*, *bhangis*, *khandis* or *arasas* to larger cadences of movements. The *batu nritya* also weaves kinetic pattern to a given metrical cycle. The sequences or the phases of this number, or a combination of various *khandis* or *arasas* resembling the *paranas* of Kathak and the *tirmanams* of Bharatanatyam. .

Leg extensions in the kneeling position are characteristic so also are the movements only on the heels, each movement, phase and it is normally in a triplet This number if followed by an invocatory composition usually dedicated



to a particular deity of the dancer's choice and is known as the *Ishta devata vandana*. Here the dancer can choose either a *sloka* from Sanskrit or Oriya poetry. This number is akin to the *shabdam* of Bharatanatyam. It is largely in line although there are short pieces of pure dance or *nritya*. .

From rhythm and pure *sahitya*, the dancer moves on to the *swara pallavi*, where for the first time, a melody is introduced, which the dancer illustrates through movement. These may be combinations of sound patterns in a *raga*, just an illustration of the various notes of the musical scale. The *swara pallavi* is a pure *nritya* number with an emphasis on hand gestures (*hastabhinaya*). When it is executed in a very slow tempo it is called the illustration of the *alap*, but it may also be executed in a medium or fast tempo. .

This is followed by numbers which are known as either the *gitabhinaya* or the *sa-abhinaya nritya*. In these numbers, words are introduced and the poetic line is sung in a particular musical mode. The songs are generally well-known compositions of poets like Jayadeva, Upendrabhanjadev or Banmali Das. The dancer attempts to interpret, in a variety of ways, the meaning of the words and to communicate the *sthayibhava* of the song. Each word, with its particular nuance, is interpreted through the combined language of the hands, body and face. This number gives a dancer full scope to present *sancharibhava* and is analogous to the *abhinaya* and *padams* of Bharatanatyam, the *padams* of Kathakali, and the *bhajan* or even a *thumri* of Kathak. *Asthapadis* of *Gita Govinda* are a must in an Orissi recital. This is real test of a dancer's capabilities of *abhinaya*. Many heroine types (*nayikas*) are presented in this portion of the recital and the measure of the dancer's competence can be judged from his or her ability to present successfully the many shades of meaning contained in the words of the *padas*. .

The subject-matter of the literary composition (*sahitya*) to which the dance is performed is mostly Vaishnavite, depicting man's yearning for God. The *sakhibhava* of the later bhakti cult is once again seen here. While the great dancer lifts the apparently sensuous theme to mystical heights of dedication, the average dancer can do no more than present the sensuous aspects. As in the other dance styles, an Orissi recital ends on a note of pure abstract design. Here it is the *tarajan*, a parallel to the *tillana* of Bharatanatyam, and the Kathak *tarana*. The *bols* are sung and into them many intricate rhythm patterns in pure *nritya* are woven.

In recent years the repertoire of Orissi has been greatly enlarged and many new compositions have been added, both in the *nritya* and the *abhinaya* portions. A variety of *swara pallavis* have been composed in the *nritya* portion, and the final number is often the *moksha* or *moksha nritya* comparable to a *tillana* or *tarana*. In the *abhinaya* section, compositions of Hindi poets such as Tulsidas have been added.



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# MANIPURI

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Manipuri may be described as a dance form which is at once the oldest and the youngest among the classical dances. Seemingly free and unbound governed only in a limited manner by the poetic line and the melody, a long wining metrical system, it is in fact rigorously structured and its easy flow and spontaneity is its outer form which makes for a smooth communication but is not to be mistaken for simplicity. What is identified as the stage art, Manipuri is only one fragment or section or the outermost layer of much larger and deeper complex tradition which has many layers of civilization and culture going back in time. Its contemporary vitality is the result of its being integral to the life of community at large.

Although a full and comprehensive history of Manipur has yet to be written, it is clear from the fragmentary evidence, both of the records of Manipur and elsewhere as also from secondary evidence of other literatures of India, that this jewel of natural beauty lying in the hills of the north-eastern borders of India has attracted from times immemorial people from different parts of the country and from other parts of the world. The small valley and the adjoining hills have been the home of many tribes and groups of people. Amongst these are those known by the generic terms Nagas (including the Maos, the Tankhuls, the Kabuis); besides there is a whole group of people known by another generic term called the Kukis. Other tribes and groups of people with different ethnic individuality are known to the region. In the valley are the Meiteis. By some accounts, their antiquity can be traced back to the Vedic times, by other accounts, this valley was the home of the famous Chitrangada with whom Arjuna fell in love. It was perhaps also the home of the ancient tribes described in the *Mahabharata* especially the Kiratas. Whatever the heritage of the group of people whether traced back to the Vedas or the *Mahabharata* or to the more recent times many migrations took place from India ranging from Gujarat, Bengal to Orissa. Some were the result of the Vaishnavite movement which spread in this part in the 17th and 18th century. Today the Meiteis are distinctive groups known for their beautiful lifestyle, their refined rituals and their variety of skills ranging from weaving to basket-making to wood-work and above all their enchanting dances. Commonly when people speak about Manipuri dance or Manipur, they elude the one level or one aspect of the large variety of Meitei dancing which comes under the sub-category of Jagoi or at best *sankirtana*.



As in the case of Kerala, in order to understand the tradition as dance called the *rasa* dances or the various types of *sankirtana* one has to dig deeper to see the other layers of the performing arts of this region. Foremost amongst the pre-Vaishnava traditions of the performing arts are the ritual dances. These, as in other parts of India, are man's attempt to make or enact, in specific time and space the beginning of the cosmos, the creation and its ultimate destruction or devolution. .

The Meiteis were divided into seven districts or clans called the *Salais*. Each of these had particular deity connected with the vegetation, the forest and the environment. The *Lai Haraoba* is a typical example of the ritual of a re-enactment of creation, the world and the cosmos through a period of a few days. Literally, it means the festival of the gods. It is performed annually by the groups of people in the months of April and May, although there are different traditions or varieties of performing the *Lai Haraoba*. Essentially each of these follows a similar structure. Today five different varieties of the *Lai Haraoba* are known and these are associated with different venues such as Kanglai, Moirang, Kakaching, Andra and Chakpa. The festival begins with a procession going to a nearby river or a pond. Here the leaders of the village invoke the spirits of the waters. The leaves—one placed facing the sky and the other covers the first leaf. The ritual symbolises the emergence of life from the eternal waters. Ritually, a seed is put within the two leaves. The procession returns with a filled pitcher from the pond and the leaves placed above it. The procession with the leaders then installs, this consecrated pitcher with leaves in a temporary shrine. Symbolically, this is the coming together of matter and energy Shiva and Shakti. Then begins a festival lasting 10-15 days where each act of creation of life on earth is enacted. The leaders of the festival are the male priests and the women priests. From the moment of immersing the leaves in the waters when the spirit of the gods is invoked to the last, these human priests look as if consecrated and belong to another world. It is they, who throw the flowers into the waters or place the seed between the two leaves; in the second phase they invoke the quarters. These are the four corners of the State of Manipur.

They involve the Lord of the Moirang—Thangjing—the Lord of north-west, the Lord of the southwest—Wangbaren; the Lord of the south-east—Morjing, and Koubru—the Lord of the northeast. Having infused life and invoked the directions, they invoke the beginning of life. This stage is very important phase of the dance because through gesture the enactment of the creation of human life is presented. Two rows are made: each is led by the Maibi. A song describes very clearly the various stages of the creation of life, of the making of the various parts of the body and ultimately the making of man. In a subsequent phase through gestures again a house is built, through hand-gestures, bodily movement and the singing of a poetic phrase. When the house is complete there is the placing of the roof and then finally the dedication to the God. Thereafter is the installation again suggestively of the male and female



principle as *nong-pokning-thon* who perhaps represents Siva and Panthoibi who possibly represents Parvati. Having created a hut and a thatched roof installed the duties, other functions of life are re-enacted. There is a sequence where through gestures is presented the sprouting of cotton seed, its plant and the weaving of the cloth. The cloth is too then dedicated to the gods.

Fish culture is important to Manipur and therefore the next stage re-enacts life of the fish and the catching of a fish with a net. Later there is the enactment of different types of games and ultimately also wrestling, acrobatics and the presentation of the martial arts. .

It is important to keep this sequence of the ritual enactment of the making and the unmaking of Cosmos in the *Lai Haraoba* festival because many patterns and choreographical designs known to many other performing arts of Manipur continue to be inspired by both the symbolism and the artistic forms which are seen in the *Lai Haraoba* enactment. Meiteis subscribe to a deity or one may call it a design or a symbolic *Yantra* called the *Pankhanba*. This is the age-old design of the intertwined serpent without beginning and end. Each of these functions of the life as also of the creation of the universe is executed through a highly refined choreographical pattern which moves in semicircles and intertwines patterns where the beginning is the end and the end the beginning. The intricate patterns of choreography of floor design which we see in Manipuri dancing are directly related to what is integral to the festival of the *Lai Haraoba*. The figure of eight is a basic movement of the body and choreographical patterns evolve out of this.

Closely related to the *Lai Haraoba* sometimes even integral to the *Lai Haraoba* and at other times performed independently both ritually and otherwise is strong and vigorous tradition of the martial arts of Manipur. These are known as by the generic term *Thangta*. These martial arts are a parallel to the Kalari tradition or the Kallaripattiyam of Kerala. In some ways, this tradition is more rigorously structured and ritually refined. There are different types of martial skills, sometimes performed solo and sometimes performed as duets and yet at other time in groups. The solo dancer or the solo performer who wields either sword or shield invariably executes intricate pattern of designs through the movements of his feet and his arms. In each case, the pattern is of the intertwined snake called *Pankhanba*. In one number called *Akao Thengon* which is amongst the nine Thengous (ritual designs through spear) known to the martial arts traditions of Manipur, an intricate pattern of the intertwined serpent is executed in and around the space of the body of the dancer. Exactly as the Maibis had invoked the life of the waters and the life of earth, the gods of the directions, the sky and the elements now the solo performer invokes all these through his sword and spear. The movements are breath-takingly beautiful. The suppleness of the body of the dancer and his capacity for leaps, jumps, hops, covering of space is unbelievable.



Besides, these two, there are other traditions of the Manipuri or the Meitei performing arts which are important for understanding what is considered as Jagoi or *Rasa* traditions. There were the traditions of the singing of the ballads. These ballads sometimes recount the stories from the *Meitei Purana*. Chief amongst them is the singing of the history of Khamba Thoibi to the accompaniment of the stirring tunes of the instrument called Pena. The story of the love of Khamba Thoibi is sung by a single artiste where the bow of his instrument becomes a prop for enactment. He sings, he plays the instrument and he performs. Alongside are the different types of ballad singing drawn from the Sanskrit tradition. These include the Wari Leeba (singing of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*) and *Haiba Thiba* traditions. The latter requires two singers—one who sings or recites words in Sanskrit and the other who provides the commentary.

It will be obvious from the above that Manipur is the home of the dancers of the many Naga tribes, the ritual performances of the Meiteis, the singing and the recitation traditions and the traditions of the martial arts.

It was into this rich complex of cultural traditions, the music and the dance, the ritual enactment of creation and the varied tradition of the martial arts and ballad singing that Vaishnavism arrived in Manipur. Some seeds had already been sown of Vaishnavism in this part judging from the fact that a copper plate of about 763 A. D. mentions the words *Sri Hari*. King Khongtekcha is considered to be devotee of Siva and Devi. He also regarded *Sri Hari* as his supreme deity. This is not surprising because elsewhere in India the eighth and the ninth centuries were the periods of a strong and pervasive Shaivite tradition with Devi worship. Between the eighth and the fifteenth century, there is certainly a gap. The next archaeological evidence comes only from a small temple attributed to about the fifteenth century in the region of King Kyamba. This small temple lies in the Vishnupur area of Manipur. It must have been an important centre of Vaishnav worship. Again, there is a gap of nearly 200 years before we begin to find Vaishnavism in full swing. During this period, many migrations also took place. The first ruler of Manipur initiated into Vaishnavism was King Pamheiba better known as Garib Nawaz. A powerful king, an able administrator, King Garib Nawaz came under the influence of the Ramanandi Cult. It is said that he became the disciple of Shantidasa, a zealous missionary of the cult. Conflict, tension, wars, battles were not unknown. Whether through the sword or through the song, Vaishnavism took deep roots in Manipur. By the early eighteenth century, Vaishnav worship or more specifically the Krishna cult became strongly rooted. The forms of Bengali Kirtana, the literature and music of the followers of Chaitanya was popular. The son of Garib Nawaz was a devout king known as Rajasri Bhagya Chandra. He followed his father and became a disciple of Narottamdas of Bengal. The origins of many of the traditions of music and dance of Sankirtana and of *Rasa* are attributed to the genius of this king. The period of his rule, from 1763 to 1798, was one of great turmoil. He was



defeated in battles, was in exile and he re-conquered his land. Whether in exile, living with the kings of Ahom or independently, his mind and heart turned towards Krishna and Radha. Many legends are woven around his life and work but most important amongst these is a legend about his seeking the *rasa* and the costumes of the *rasa* in a dream. There is more historical truth about his having made his daughter perform the role of Radha in the performances of the *rasa*. Later his daughter renounced royalty and became a devotee of Lord Krishna. The traditions of the Krishna cult became even stronger and more popular during the rule of his successor Maharaj Chandrakirti in the nineteenth century between 1850 and 1886. Singing of the 64 *Bhakti rasas* of Bengal and performance of 64 sections of the *Sankirtanas* in the royal palace was firmly established. There was a search for a new *Padavalis*. Poets and artistes were sent to Navadeepa and Vrindavan. There was expansion of the music repertoire and a refinement of drumming. Alongside was a renewal of the festivals which punctuated the annual life of the people of Manipur. .

On the one hand there were the reasons which were celebrated with great gusto and festivity. Each was related to a particular moment or episode in Krishna's life. On the other was the life cycle of the Manipuri which as elsewhere in India was now marked by a series of ritual performances; each provided opportunity for a different type of *Sankirtana*. The first and foremost amongst the seasonal festivals was and continues to be the *Doljatra* coinciding with Holi of other part of India. It is also called the Yaosang. Yaosang literally means a small hut for the sheep, perhaps this festivity around the *Doljatra* was an amalgam or a true fusion of many strands in Manipur culture. On one plane, it was the harvesting seasons, the season of the spring, the season of new birth, of the making of new thatched huts, on the other it was the celebrations of the birth of Lord Sri Krishna Chaitanya the great devotee of Bengal Vaishnavism. On the third, it was related to the Puranic myth of the burning of Holika. In all cases, it was the full moon of Phalguna and it was and is the period which celebrates the dance of Lord Krishna and the *gopis* at Vrindavan as described in the *Srimad Bhagvata*. Elsewhere in India, especially Assam, ritual festivities are held on this occasion, thatched huts are made and burnt at the end of the festival. In North India the Holika is burnt and this is followed by the festivity of colour throwing or recognised popularity as the occasion of the Holi. In Manipur, the *Doljatra*, the *Phalguna Purnima* takes its own character when the men and women join together to sing and dance collectively before the Govindji Temple. This is the *Sankirtana* called *Holi Pala*. As in the case of the Lai Haraoba where the festival ended with collective dancing of young men and women alternately now also at the time of Yaosang Festival, young men and women dance together throughout the night weaving serpentine movements again recreating in floor patterns the design of the intertwined snake. This is the period of great festivity, of the finding of life partners and of the celebrations of the spring time dance of Radha and Krishna.



Later in the year, sometime around early part of June on the second day of the bright moon of Ashada is held the *Rathyatra*. The *Rathyatra* is most famous in Jagannath Puri. This celebrates the journey of the deities when they are taken out in a procession and installed in a chariot (*Rath*). *Rathyatras* are also known to other parts of India. Manipur assimilated the Jagannath cult conventions and rituals but gave them a different form. Instead of the three chariots, there is a host of chariots which are taken out. The deities sit on them, take their residence at another temple called Gundicha and return on the eighth day. The car is decorated by skilled workers who come from far and near. There is *puja* and singing by thousands of devotees and more join in when the procession begins to move. In the *Holi Pala* and during the time of Holi, everyone sang *Hari Hari Bol*; now they sing *Jai Jagannath Jai Jagannath*.

This festival is the occasion of a very important style of singing called the *Khubak Ishai*, which really means music with clapping. It is prescribed by large group of women. The theme is Krihsna's departure from Vrindavan to Mathura, in his mission to vanquish Kamsa. However, the narration is through the words of Lord Chaitanya and each of the women represent the yearning of the human for the divine. The *Nupi* i.e. the woman *Khubak Ishai* may seem a very simple collective dance of women but it is highly structured. It is performed to vocal music and there is a minimal mime in the presentation. The presentation of the *Khubak Ishai* is an important component of the totality of Manipuri dance and some women artistes have become professionally skilled in the presentation of the *Khubak Ishai*. On this occasion, there is also another kind of style of singing called *Jayadeva* after the name of the writer of the *Gita Govinda*. The opening canto of the *Gita Govinda*, i. e. *Dasaavatara*, is sung in a very old style, perhaps a style which has something to do with other forms of Meitei singing. Not all the verses are taken from the *Gita Govinda*; many interpolations from other *Padavalis* are added.

Other seasons, especially the Autumnal full moon, Sharad *Poornima*, and the Kartik *Poornima*, soon after Diwali provide occasions for the presentation of collective music and dance sometimes performed only through singing and at other times performed to the playing of the cymbals called *Kartala* either by men or by women.

There is the life's cycle of the Manipuri. The life of Hindu is marked by 16 Samskaras; in Manipur each of these stages or Samskaras is punctuated by the performance of a particular type of *Sankirtana*. *Sankirtanas* are performed at Birth, at the first giving of solid food *anna prashana* when the ears are pierced, when the sacred thread is worn (Yagyopaveet), at marriage (vivaha) and at death and after cremation and on death anniversaries. There is no occasion when the



Manipur community does not celebrate these important moments whether these are of joy or sorrow through music and dance. These Sankirtanas, although collective ritual on one level are really the fundamental foundation on which the traditions of Manipuri dance have been structured. .

To go back for a moment to history, we know that when the Ramanandi cult became popular in Manipur the style of singing called *Bangadesh Pala* or *Aribapala* became popular. Although it is not known what is the original form of this *Bangadesh* or *Ariba Pala* was in Bengal, in Manipur it assumed a new and a very beautiful structured form. One has only to observe the performance of *Ariba Pala* in Manipur to be convinced that this Sankirtana is distinctive to Manipur's artistic manifestation. It is no longer just collective singing, it is in fact a highly structured choreography. It is performed in a *mandapa* which is constructed in a circular shape. Here first and foremost facing north sits the *Sabhapati* or the patron of the performance. On either side are seated his ministers. The Brahmins face inwards. Then enter a group of performers into this *nat mandap* where a centre has already been established. The group is led by a very experienced renowned performer artists *Guru Ishei Hanba*. A *mridangam* player is equally important. Then the second respondent group enters led by the *Duhar*. The seating, the execution and the sequence of the performance follows a pattern which is very clearly outlined and there can be no departures from it. Closely observed whether it is a group of *Ariba Pala* players or the later type of *Sankirtana* performers popularly known as the *nata sankirtana* each of these executes a pattern of design of the intertwined serpents through drumming, singing in slow, middle and fast tempos and chiselled movement patterns of the intertwined serpents.

The whole group moves from one sequence to the other and ultimately the performance culminates in a crescendo of ecstasy. While one cannot make any conclusive statements, but it would appear that some aspects of the *Lai Haraoba* tradition and some of the choreographical patterns of the *Ariba Pala* (or the *Bangadesh Pala* type) of *Sankirtana* fused in Manipur. Alongside evolved a new form of *Sankirtana* now called the *Nata Pala*, the word *Nat* in this case meaning dancer, *nartak*, actor, *abhineta*. The beginnings of the *Nat Sankirtana* are attributed to the reign of King Chandrakirti by some scholars and to Bhagya Chandra Maharaj by others. Whenever this particular form of *Sankirtana* began and possibly it did begin with the devotee King Bhagya Chandra Maharaj, it was a further refinement of the *Ariba Pala* tradition. Today it is considered the most important ritual performance. In fact the Meiteis call this a *mahayagna* as it lasts for nearly five hours at a stretch, begins with preliminary rituals, follows a rigorous structure, and culminates in a moment of great ecstasy. Like the *Bangadesh Pala*, the group comprises two teams. Usually, there are 16 artistes who enter the *mandap* of the enclosure. On one side is the main performer—the *abhineta* called *Ishei Hanba*, along with three other supporting musicians, dancers; on the other side another semicircle is made by the respondent dancer



player *abhineta* called *Duhar*. He too enters with his group of supporting artistes. Two players on the Manipuri *Mridangam* called *Punga* are most important. The entire group called *Pala* enters the *Mandap* where a centre has already been established by the placement of plantain leaf, a piece of cloth and with ritual objects surrounding it. After performing the preliminary rituals, called the *Mandali puja*, which symbolically invoke the five Vaishnav saints—Krishna Chaitanya, Nityananda, Adhuta, Gadaghat and Sahrivats there is the announcement by the President of the assembly as in the case of the *Ariba Pala*. He announces that there will now be the invocation to the saints. Soon after the two *mridangam* players strike and execute a most intricate sequence of drumming. In counter distinction to other forms of singing in Manipur, the *mridangam* playing itself follows a specific sequence of *ragas*. Each sequence of drumming is in a particular *raga*. Thereafter the chief dancer or the leader i.e. *Ishei Hanba* sings in a very slow tempo a melody which could be called an *alap*. This is once again followed by the playing of the *mridangam* as also a very balanced and controlled playing on the cymbals by the supporting group. This section is called the *sanchar* or the variations of the improvisations of the *mridangam* which is punctuated by the playing on the *Kartal* or the large cymbals. These sections may be considered all as preliminaries of prelude to the main performance which begins when *Ishei Hanba* or the leader starts a section known as *sabha vandana* i. e. salutation to the audience. Soon after he returns to the *Guru Vandana* which deals with the theme of the life of Chaitanya or Gaur Chandra. Then is the presentation by the two groups of a series of intricate metrical cycles, sung lyrics playing on the pun. Sometime there can be presentation of as many as 64 different types of the *bhavas*. The sections of the metrical cycle called the *cachouba* in a '8' beat cycle, sometimes is also called the *teen-tala achouba*. This is followed by a *teen-macha* which is in a 7-beat pattern or a 14-beat pattern called the *Rajamel*. Here, the main performer—the respondent, the group, the *mridangam* player all execute together or separately the most intricate improvisations on the basic metrical cycle. The period of realisation almost follows when from the *Rajamel* the group moves on to the rendering, of the metrical cycle known as *Tan Chepa* set to a 4-beat cycle. Finally, there is the *Menkupa* set to a 6—beat metrical cycle pattern. In each of these, there is the playing of the drum, there is the singing by the main actor, dancer and the response of the second group led by the *Duhar* and the execution of choreographical pattern by the supporting actors, dancers who play on the *Kartals*. All in all, the rigorous structuring of the *nata sankirtana*, its sequence, its change of moods and its presentation of the different groups of the metrical cycles is a staggering piece of structured musical compositions and choreographical patterns. The lyrics or the songs are many; however, one single theme is chosen for elaboration for a particular sankirtana. The group may well choose only the theme of the *nayikas* and present the different moods of the heroine as that of the *abhisarika* or the lady going out for a tryst or another type like the *mugdha*, the quarrelsome etc. The dancers singly or collectively consider themselves to be the *gopis* who are yearning for the Lord. So no matter of which



theme is chosen, it is in fact only a performer who underlines the yearning of the human for the divine. The singing is marked by an easy flow through three octaves, high pitched singing which has pathos and compassion, ecstasy and pain built into it. At moments or climax and at moments of great ecstasy, a member of the audience pays obeisance to the centre by a *dandavat pranam* (prostrate). The actors, dancers respond also by prostrating on the ground. The communication between the audience which sits around the *mandap* and the performers within the *mandap* is complete. The atmosphere is charged and tears flow effortlessly through sheer joy. These *sankirtanas* constitute a system of metrical cycles, *talas*, techniques of very controlled and restrained kind, vocal music and drumming. There are sections of the *Pala* which have great delicacy and grace. There are others which are vigorous and masculine and which constitute the *Tandava* portions of classical Manipuri dance. Sometimes, dancers can execute movements which are reminiscent of birds and animals, at other times there are men with women's. Often many of the dancers or men both in the *Ariba Pala* as also in the *Nutan Pala* are above 60 or 70 and sometimes 80. The performance of the *Nata Sankirtana* is a unique experience unparalleled to anything anywhere else in India. Here, as in the *Ariba Pala*, the choreographical pattern centres around the intertwined snakes or the figure of 8.

Finally, then there is also another type of *kirtana* called the *Dhrumel*. Here 14 *mridangam* players playing on the drums the entire sections of the *Nata Sankirtana*. Understandably, the emphasis is on the intricate *talas*, the improvisations of the *sanchar* and execution of many types of permutations and combinations. Symbolically, the 14 types of improvisations or variations are dedicated to the saints beginning with Chaitanya and going to Nityananda and to the eight *sadhus* and the six *goswamis* of Vrindavan. The *Dhrumel* is also highly stylised and structured form of the performance understandably. This is also considered a *yagna*.

While one cannot make any conclusive statements on the relationship of the earlier types of Manipur dance i.e. the Pre-Vaishnavite and Post-Vaishnavite, it is clear that the *Vaishnavite* traditions of poetry, music and dance were superimposed as a further layer on the vibrating highly *sophisticated* culture of the Meities. .

We have referred only to a few of the traditions of Manipur dance. There are many more. It was from this complex that the *rasa* dances evolved. Indeed, one would think that the *rasa* dances performed only by women were the last of the performance sequences of a much more elaborate ritual performance comprising invocations, singing the execution of the *Palas* followed by the drumming complex.

We referred earlier to the dream of Bhagya Chandra Maharaj when the *rasa* dancers came to him as a vision. While one may question the authenticity of this



legend, one cannot ignore that Bhagya Chandra Maharaj laid the foundations of everything that we recognise by the generic term Manipuri dance. .

### Texts

Although there is meagre textual literature on Manipuri dance, mention must be made of *Sangeeta Lila Vilas*. Despite the fact that the manuscript has been the subject of considerable heated controversy in regard to its authorship, date and authenticity, its contents are significant for understanding the technique of Manipuri dance. On the whole, although it follows the *Natyasastra* tradition, it is no slavish imitation. There are significant departures. In this work, he defines *tandava* and *lasya*, which are not found in the treatises of the medieval period from other parts of India. The *tandava* is divided into the *chalanam* and the *gunthanam*. *Lasya* is also subdivided into *simitanga* and *sphuritanga*. This classification is distinctive to this work and is followed to this day in contemporary practice. This classification of Natya also differed from the classification known to the other treatises which have only divided the generic term into *nritya* and *natya*. The author divides it into *rasaka* and *rupaka*. The work *rupaka* may be identified as a variant of the *dasa rupaka* and the other *natika* and *prakarana* forms of the *natyasastra* tradition. The *rasaka* comes as something new. Although *rasa* is mentioned in the *Natyasastra*, it is not elaborately described by Bharata. The author devotes a full chapter to the *rasaka* and speaks in detail of the various types of *rasa* dances—the *maharasa*, *majurasa*, *nityarasa*, *nirvesarasa* or the *kunjarasa*. He also speaks about the *goparasa* and quotes not Bharata as his authority but Gargacharya.

Judging from these descriptions, it would appear that, in Manipuri not only the purely classical tradition of the *Natyasastra* but also the Puranic tradition of the *Srimad Bhagvata* have been blended. An authoritative sanction is thus given to the dance. In his discussion of the various *angas* and *upangas*, we find a detailed account of the knee position and *hastas*. Significantly, however, we do not find a minute discussion of the various facial movements which were dealt at length in the treatises of the South, especially those in Telugu and Malayalam. .

A comparison of the textual description and contemporary practices reveals that by and large, Manipuri receives its theoretical sanction from this or conversely that the text reconstructs the theory on the basis of actual practice. It gives a comprehensive account of the *chalis* and the *bhangis* known to the dance style the *gatibhangas* as also the various types of *chalans* and *sthanakas*. All these are unique to Manipur.

Other relevant manuscripts have been found, such as the *Mridanga Sangraha*. This work is attributed to Chandrakirti and contains extremely valuable details



of playing the particular variety of drum called the *khol* in Manipuri. The other treatise, *Sri Krishna Rasa Sangita Sangraha* by Bhakti Sidhanta, was, perhaps, written *earlier* than the *Mridanga Sangraha*; it contains many of the lyrics to which the *rasa* dances are performed today.

### The Technique

In technique, Manipuri is a far cry from anything we know in the other styles of dance. It has a flow and a grace which contrasts from the precision of the South Indian Styles. This impression of ease and fluidity, which is not a negation of precision, results from an unusual treatment of the body. The vertical line of the body is never broken. There are no deflections or sharp shifts from particular horizontal sutras as in Orissi or in Bharatanatyam. In fact, the body merely curves itself into a figure of 8. The positions attained are thus relaxed and controlled rather than sculptural. An effort is made to connect two parts of the body through beautiful curves. There are no sudden transitions from particular horizontal sutras as in Orissi or in Bharatanatyam. In fact, the intertwined serpents (*nagabandha mudra*) as a basic motif, it is no longer possible to have a spread out, open position of the lower limbs so characteristic of the South Indian styles. The knees are kept close together, flexed in front, in what may be identified as the *nata* position of the knees in the *Natyasastra* tradition. The body is held upright, but without any tension. The torso once again is not treated as a unit, but is divided into two distinct parts above the *katisutras*, the chest and the waist. Neither unit is used singly because the bend of any one part by itself would mean creating an angle. Thus, the chest and the waist, although moving in opposition, are always connected. The effect is of the slow drawing of a curve in the shape of "S", but is never a simple bend. The neck and the head follow this principle but the head never moves horizontally as in Bharatanatyam or Kathak. Instead, it also executes a figure 8 in space. The arms and hands follow the pattern of the lower limbs and the torso. They too are never tense nor are they ever in acute flexion. They are held, in a naturally relaxed manner away from the body in a semicircular curve. The wrists play an extremely important part in the movement of the hands and the fingers, because it is the wrists which give the movements of the fingers a unique fluidity. A basic movement is the gradual closing in and opening out of the fingers, while the wrist attempts to execute a lateral figure of 8. The face is placid and without any exaggerated facial expressions. This controlled, but not unduly severe or austere, expression is sustained throughout the performance.

What has been described here is however, restricted to the movements of the feminine type and may be described, in the language of the *Govinda Sangita Lila Vilas* as the *simitanga*. A deliberate attempt at limiting space and restricting movement is made here. In the *sphuritanga*, although greater freedom is allowed, it is once again within the definite limits set by the dancer. In the *Lasya* portions, even in the *sphuritanga*, the dancer does not and cannot lift her foot



away from the ground above the level of the knee. The release from the ground is invariably characterized by a sweep of the ground, a gliding movement almost touching the floor rather than a movement where the foot is lifted high above the ground. .

The situation changes considerably in the *tandava* portion known for its agility, verve and high leaps, whether executed by women in the role of the child Krishna or by men in the numerous male dances of the region. The basic position in *tandava* is no longer the closed feet with knees bent in front leaving no space between them. Now there is nearly a four *tala* distance between the two feet and the knees are bent in front. Normally, this is the position of the *pungchalam* dancers who usually maintain this position practically throughout the number. In the *tandava* portions, the torso is occasionally treated as a separate unit and side-bends are frequent. There are many sitting positions and many spirals and turns known to the dance style, both in *lasya* and *tandava*. In *lasya*, the *sthanakas* or various positions once again attempt to limit space and although women dancers change the level throughout a performance, there is hardly ever much space between the two feet. In the *tandava* portions, the *sthanakas* take the form of positions known as the *vrischika karnas* of the *Natyasastra* tradition. Some of these are common Orissi and Manipuri. There are few leg extensions in the *lasya* or the *tandava* portions. The *gunthanam* described in the *Govinda Sangita Lila Vilas* in the context of *tandava* may be identified as the various sitting and jumping movements in *tandava* when there is comparatively little distance between the feet and the knees. However, neither in the *tandava* portions nor in the *lasya* portions are hip movements allowed. There is one type of thigh or pelvic movement known to the dance style. It is an up-and-down movement rather than a side-to-side movement, with the shift of weight from one foot to the other characteristic of styles like the Orissi. The up-and-down movement is achieved through knee dips and through a suggestion of a hop on the toe. .

The manner of covering space in Manipuri is expressive of its grace and delicacy. The dancer covers floor space also in figures of 8 and then the foot is lifted to cover space, it invariably touches the ground by a slight toe movement rather than flat foot or the heel. The *kunchita* foot or the *agratalasanchara* foot of the *Natyasastra* is seen repeatedly in this dance style. Many of the complex dance movements are derived from a dexterous use of the *kunchita* foot .

### The Movements

The dancer begins with the movements known as the *chali*. The *chali* need not be identified with the *chari* of the *Natyasastra*, but it is definitely a movement which suggests basic ways of walking and covering space. The dancer moves first to the front and back with hands held horizontally at the chest level and then moves these hands vertically in an up-and-down direction. She then covers



space in side ways walking, ending by weaving circles and spirals. In these basic movements, the various types of *bhramaris* are introduced, the two distinct varieties being the *uplai* and the *longlai*. The *uplai* and the *longlai* have been identified by some scholars as the *bhava bhramari* and *bhramari* of the *Natyasastra*. We may understand these *lais* whether in *lasya* or in *tandava* as ways of covering floor space; usually, it is sideways movement followed by a semicircle. They are the finale of the dance cadences and are often executed in multiples of three as in the *tihai* of the other dance styles. Sometimes, a spiral movement in vertical space is executed, where the dancer treats her body like a screw and weaves a spiral vertically from a higher level to lower level. While doing so, the dancer also takes a circle or a spin. This very difficult movement has a graceful fluidity, sometimes mistaken for imprecision. The *achongba* of jumping movements are characteristic of the *tandava* portions of the dance. .

The basic movements of the *chali* are connected together to form the various types of *parengs*. The *parengs* are perhaps parallel to the *tirmanams* of Bharatanatyam, for they are cadences of movements in a given metrical cycle. The metrical cycles are very many and in-beats and the cross-beats are complicated, requiring a high sense of precision. All the *lais* are used in *parengs* and different types of *talas*. are employed, especially the *rajmela*, the seven beats (*rupaka*), 15 beats (*panchamsvari*) and the 16 beats (*tintala*). Three *bhangis* are attributed to king bhagya Chandra Maharaja and two to his descendent, King Chandrakirti. The first three *bhangis*, and the *bhangi pareng achongba*, the *Vrindavan pareng* and the *khurumba pareng* are known as the *lasya* cadences. They are used in common *rasa* portions of the dance. The three other *bhangis* have a common adjective *gostha* which stands for the *tandava bhangis*. They are used by actors while presenting the character of Krishna in the *rasa* dances. Three such *bhangis* are prescribed, namely the *gostha bhangi pareng*, the *gostha khurumba pareng*, and the *gostha khurumba pareng*. The last one is rarely performed and seems to have gone out of vogue. .

With such an elaborate system, it is not surprising that the dance has a highly complex technique of movement and *tala*. The dance is not restricted to solo numbers. Manipuri is perhaps the only classical style in which we find exquisite survivals of compositions, such as the *hallisaka*, the *charchari* and other forms mentioned in classical Sanskrit literature. Group formations mentioned in the *Natyasastra* have been lost to other classical forms. One comes across some survivals in folk forms, but Manipuri exhibits, in a well-chiselled fashion, the many types of *pindibandhas* described in the *Natyasastra*. In the *rasa* dances, we find that all the four types of *pindis* mentioned by Bharata can be seen. We also see that other group formations mentioned in later texts find a place in the different numbers of the Manipuri dance. .

### The Repertoire

As will be obvious from the account of the complex history of Manipur and the evaluation of different genres, the repertoire of Manipuri is extensive. If we take



into account the innumerable festivals, the *Sankirtanas*, the singing styles and the larger variety of participative community dances known to Manipur and still practised, the repertoire in modern terms would be considered to be inexhaustible. Only for purposes of understanding although no hard and fast rules can be made, one may divide the repertoire of Manipuri dances into three or four broad categories. This would not include the whole group of dances which one would call tribal or folk. The first group would comprise the pre-*Vaishnav* dance forms or dance rituals. These would include what we have already described in the *Lai Haroaba* and the presentation of singing and enactment of the stories of *Khaba Thoibi*. Closely related to this group would be the *Thang ta* or the martial ritual dancers of Manipur, all these belong to pre-*Vaishnav* state of Manipuri culture. The second group would constitute the dance and dance music sections of the various *jatras* in Manipur. The *Holi Pala* the *Khumbak Ishei* and other numbers today presented on the stage are part and parcel of these seasonal festivities. So also is the popular *Thabala Chongbi* which is part of the *Yaosang* dances. The third group would constitute the different types of *Sankirtana* traditions. We have referred to only the *Ariba Pala* and the *Anuba Pala*, i.e. the *Bangadesh Kirtana* and the *Nata Sankirtana*, but there are others such as the *Manohar Sahi* and of course the *Dhrumel*. Part and parcel of these *Sankirtana* was the group dancing, the various types of walking or group forms executed either through clapping or through the playing of small cymbals called *Manjira* or large cymbals called *Kartala*.

A fourth group may be considered for the ballad forms which have both a vocal as also a miming aspect to them. Among these would be the presentation through solo duet rendering in the forms known as the *Wariliba*, the *Haiba Thiba*, etc. A most important part of Manipuri repertoire is recognised by the generic term *Jagoi*. At the artistic level, one may consider the *Jagoi* as the main type of art dance. It is somewhat difficult to have a definitive meaning of the word *Jagoi* which literally only means dance. Nevertheless, perhaps one could understand this term and the group of number or repertoire that it represents as those sections of music and dance from amongst the *Sankirtanas* which could be presented outside the ritual parameters. Perhaps it was with this in view that the traditional gurus of Manipur have divided the *Jagoi* into several sub-categories such as the *Pungalola Jagoi*, the *Motkanba Jagoi* and just *Lila*. There is a further subdivision which is made by adding the adjectives *Nupa* or *Nupi*—*Nupa* standing for man and *Nupi* for woman. Amongst the further divisions are the *Cholam*, the *Kartala Cholam*, the *Mridang Cholam*, the dance of the *ghosta lila* (also called the *shanshenba Jagoi*), and the spear dances.

There are various types of *cholams*, and the different varieties of the *kartalis*. The *cholams* are both *lasya* and *tandava*. Those belonging to the feminine group are the *cholams* of the small cymbals, namely, the *Manjira cholam* and those of the *tandava* type are the *Kartala cholams* with large cymbals. The dance of the *Pung* which is performed by men, may be said to be the highest achievement. The



dance may be executed by a solo performer or by a hundred men. The range of sound which can be produced through the *pung* has to be experienced to be believed. Perhaps, among percussion instruments, there is no other *mridanga* which can command the same range of communicative sound as the *pung*.

There are other *cholam* dances too, such as the *duff cholam* and the *kanjira cholam*. Amongst the *kartali* dances are the clapping items performed only by women known as the *nupi khumbak ishei* and the *nupa khumbak ishei*. These are group dances in which a number of interesting group formations can be seen and the dance is built on clapping of hands at cross rhythms to be basic rhythm played by the accompanying *pung*. All the *cholam* and the *kartali* dances are pure *nritta*. There is no *abhinaya*, nor is there any song accompaniment. Originally performed in the context of the *Rathyatra*, these numbers are now performed independently as part of stage repertoire.

Like the *cholam* and the *kartalis*, the *thang haiba* and the *takhew saiba*, or the sword and the spear dances, which belong to the *tandava* category, have now become part of the artistic repertoire. Originally, these were performed either in the context of ritual magical performances or as a sequence in the *Lai Haraoba*. When incorporated as an artistic number, these are called *thangta jagoi*. These are vaguely reminiscent of the *kalis* of Kerala and are purely martial dances.

The *Nupi Jagoi* or the women's dance mentioned above is the graceful variety quite distinct from the *tandava* type of dancing which is divided into two main sub-divisions-the first *Bhangi Jagoi*, and the second *Pungloli Jagoi* i.e. that which is performed only to the mnemonics of the *Pung* the Manipuri *Mridangam*. The *Bhangi Jagoi* is marked by seriousness of purpose, a slow tempo and a very careful delivery of movements which are controlled and restrained. It comes under the category of what we have called the *smitanga*. In contrast, the *Pungloli Jagoi* is executed in a fast tempo or in old three tempos like the three *kala tirmans* of Bharatanatyam. The mnemonics have a particular tempo, a metrical pattern and a repetition ending in triplets of three. All these should be considered both of the male and the female as pure abstract dancing without mime or *abhinaya*. This is the *nritta* repertoire of Manipuri dancing. It must, however, be remembered that none of these numbers are dissociated from the repertoire which we have mentioned in the context of the *sankirtana* and the *jatra* dances.

## Rasa

It is only when we come to the *rasa* dances of Manipur that the richness and dexterity of both *nritta*, pure dance and *abhinaya*, mime of the Manipuri style is evident. Although the *rasa* dances are closely related to the presentation of the *Nata sankirtana* in the Govindji Temple and on specific occasion the *sankirtan* precedes the presentation of the *rasa*. The *rasa* dances have a structure and



technique which can distinguish them from any other type of dance in Manipur. The *rasa* dances of Manipur are lyrical, narrative and not dramatic unlike Kathakali. Nevertheless, the composition both literary and musical have rigorous structuring comprising vocal passages, percussion, pure dance, mime, all of which is similar to the structuring of a full Kathakali play. Bhagya Chandra Maharaj or King Jai Singh is considered the composer of at least three of the four *rasa* dances known to Manipur. As in the case of the other dances whether these are the *sankirtanas* or the *Lai Haroaba*, the *rasa* dances are also performed on particular occasion and in particular season. .

First and the foremost is the *Vasant Rasa* for the full moon day of Holi. While men perform the *holi pala* and there is the season of the *Dol yatra*, women perform the *Vasant Rasa*. The *Vasant Rasa* or any other *rasa* is invariably preceded by the *Natapala* or the group of men dancers who play the drum and sing. Thereafter there is the presentation of a particular *raga* in this case, *Vasant Raga* by women singers now called *sutradhari*. Here the singing sets the tone of the presentation of the *rasa*. A particular mood is invoked and the players and the audience become prepared to transport themselves into the world of Lord Krishna in Vrindavan. Thereafter, there is the description of Vrindavan sung by the *sutradhari* and followed through dance by a group of young dancers. .

The next sequence is *Vaishnav Vandana*. The most exciting part of the *rasa* is the entry of the young Krishna, normally played by a young girl. Thereafter is the presentation of the main theme in the case of *Vasant Rasa*. It is the theme of the *gopis* playing Holi with Krishna. At one moment, Krishna decides mischievously to put powdered colour in the eyes of Radha. This leads to the next sequence where Radha seemingly rejects Krishna. He implores her. He pleads with her. Then the union follows, the *gopis* surround the pair, the *yugul roop*, and there is the culminating or *prarthna*. .

The *Kunj Rasa* is somewhat simpler. It is performed sometime in August coinciding with what is known as the full moon or *rakhi* or *rakhi purnima*: The theme of this *rasa* is drawn from the *Srimad Bhagvata*. It revolves round the mutual hide and seek of Radha and Krishna. The *rasa* is performed in a special group and it recreates the dance of the *gopis* with Krishna. A third *rasa* called the *nritya rasa* which was perhaps created by Maharaj Chandrakirti in the nineteenth century can be performed at any time. Here dance rather than the story or the theme is more important. The libretto is chosen from the poetic work called the *Govindalila Amritam* written by Shri Krishnadas Kaviraj. Here the sequence is different. It begins with the *Krishna Abhisar* and the waiting of Krishna and preparation for the *gopis* and Radha to be drawn to his flute. Some people believe that this *rasa* is mentioned in the *Padma Purana* where the *nritya lilas* of Lord Krishna are described. Most important and impressive, however, is the *Maharasa* created by Bhagya Chandra Maharaj and presented in the precincts of Govindji Temple on *Kartik Purnima*. This is easily the most refined



and chiselled complete artistic composition with a beginning, middle and an end. It begins as in the case of the *Vasant Rasa* with a prologue of the *nata sankirtana*, the entrance of the *sutradhari*, the singing of a *rags*, in this case Kedar, the description of Vrindavan, the *Vaishnav Vandana*, the Krishna *Abhisar*, the *mandali sajana*, the song of the *gopis*, the presentation of the *Bhangi pareng* the dance of Krishna, the dance of Radha, the *atma samarpana*, the offering, the *prarthna* and finally the *arti*. .

The *Vishnu Purana*, the *Srimad Bhagvata Purana* vividly describe the dance of Krishna with the *gopis*. Initially, Krishna commands the *gopis* to return to their homes and their families. The *gopis* do not listen and entreat him to dance with them. Krishna begins to dance with the *gopis* who believe that their partner is Krishna, but in fact it is only an illusion. In between Krishna also disappears. He re-appears. All this provides for great variety in choreographic pattern singing, in dance and the role of Radha. The role of Radha is played a seasoned dancer and a singer. Radha does not play a part in the *Vishnu or the Bhagavat Purana*. It is only the later traditions which combine the story of the *Bhagavata Purana* and the love of Krishna and Radha of the *Gita Govinda*. It is this assimilated form of the two stories which is strung together in a single theme which constitutes the libretto of the *Maharasa* of Manipur. The *Maharasa* provides immense scope for the high order of singing, excellence in very restrained manner and excellence in the presentation of highly intricate pure dance passages, i.e. the *Bhangis*. .

Besides these *rasa* dances, there are the *lilas*. The enactment of Krishna childhood with his mother Yashoda or with his companions. These *lilas* also constitute an important part of the repertoire of the Manipuri dance. The *gostha lila* recreates the play on Krishna and Balarama; Krishna and Yashoda, and the dances of Krishna with his companions. The main singer for the *gostha lila* is a man and not a woman. In the presentation of the *gostha lila*, other *lilas* of Krishna such as the killing of the demon Dhenuka and Bakasura, etc. are presented. In the *ulukhala rasa*, the birth of Krishna, Putna vadh, etc. including *makhan chori* are presented. When we compare this repertoire of the *rasa* dancers, the four main *rasa* dances and two *gostha lilas* we realise that the inspiration of this repertoire comes from all that we know of the *rasa* and the *lilas* in Vrindavan. Transported to Manipur, it acquires a new-chiselling, a new sequence, a new interpretation in spirit and ethos and the ultimate goal is identical. The Vaishnavite fervor lives and vibrates in the hearts of every Manipuri and truly through the *rasa* dances and the presentation of the *lilas* Vrindavan is created in every heart in far off Manipur. On one level of these dances are community shared with full participation of the performers and the participators. On the other are their sophisticated pieces of opera with libretto musical scales, *ragas*, *talas*, giving enough scope for pure *nritta abhinaya* and the combination of both singing and dancing. If Kathakali perfected in the hero types, Manipur seems to have perfected in the heroine types but all through the



configuration of the myriad moods, transitory states, there is only one dominant mood which is evoked. This is that of *Karuna*, compassion. If the concept of the state of elevated, uplifted, aesthetic experience through music and dance has to be experienced one must participate in the presentation of *Maharasa* in the precincts of the Sri Govindji Temple or be of attuned heart in a *Sankirtana* presentation. The singing and the drumming, the variations of the tempos, the patterns of rhythmic permutation and combination, the slow and doubling and tripling of tempos with breathtaking smooth transitions and the execution of the movements called the *bhangis* all accumulatively lead to a state of ecstasy. Ecstasy for he who performs, ecstasy for he who responds and is of attuned heart. From this body of the large *rasa* dances, the *gostha lilas*, the moods of *karuna*, compassion, affection *vatsalya* etc. emerged smaller numbers. These were creations of the gurus of the last century.

Among these, the most important being was the late Guru Amobi Singh. Sometimes, he abridged *rasa* for purposes of stage. At other times, he chose lyrics from the *Gita Govinda* or from Vidyapati's *Padavali* or the works of other poets of the Bhakti school and presented them as short numbers. This presentation is largely solo. Exactly as a presentation of by a sole Bharatanatyam dancer.



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# KATHAK

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In any discussion of Kathak as a major dance-form, several questions arise, since the style evolved gradually during the course of several centuries, imbibing diverse influences. There are some primary questions concerning this art form; what is its chronological place in relation to other styles; does it share the Hindu myth and legend of the other dance forms; did it originate in the Moghul Courts.

The answers to these questions are found only on close examination of the historical, literary and other available evidence. For this purpose, it would not be necessary to go into the history of the dance in north India prior to the tenth or eleventh century. Until then, there was a common art tradition in the country. In fact, temples continued to be built in Bundelkhand, Rajasthan and Gujarat till about the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries A. D. Dance had till then continued to flourish in the precincts of the temples. The dance style prevalent in north India was akin to the Bharatanatyam or Orissi—at least the sculptural evidence points towards this conclusion.

However, with the rise of the Moghul Empire and with the establishment of a state religion which did not believe in dance as a form of worship, some shift in emphasis naturally took place. As a result, in sculpture or at least in temple sculpture, dancing figures disappeared totally. Nonetheless, the wave of the *Bhakti* movement, which had swept the country during these centuries, influenced dance and music forms in north India as much as in south India. The compositions of Mira Bai, Surdas and other Saint-poets are replete with references to the devotees dancing before their God. An examination of the Braj poetry of the *Ritikala* literature in Hindi and the Rajasthani dialect give ample proof that dance continued to be used as an “image” or conventional “motif” in poetry.

Indian sculpture in the post-fifteenth century, understandably, does not provide any significant evidence about the dance in the dance images (*nritya murtis*). The absence of the motif of the dance is, however, amply compensated/matched by a prolific evidence of dance and dance-drama in mural and miniature painting in all parts of India. For reconstructing the history of Kathak, three styles of



miniature paintings provide valuable evidence. First and foremost are dance illustrations in the Jaina paintings and manuscripts, specially the *Kalpa Sutra* and the *Samghrani Sutra*. In the famous *Deva Sampada Kalpa Sutra* circa 1475 to 1500 and the *Jamnagar Kalpa Sutra* dated 1501 A.D., there are innumerable marginal figures which vividly portray many types of dances. While some of these figures point towards a style which has affinities with Orissi, there are others which indicate the emergence of a style which we may recognise as Kathak. In the sixteenth century A.D. also appears another style of painting, today commonly labelled as the *Charu Panchashikha* style. In the miniatures based on the ballad and plays such as *Madhu Malati*, *Mrigavati* and the *Laur Chanda*, there are many interesting scenes where dance is presented in the context of palace scene, a courtyard, and the rest. This group of a painting of the Sultanate variety is most important because it is this group of painting which enables us to understand a gradual transition of the dance from the milieu of the temple to the court.

The second group of paintings are those which were commissioned in the Mughal courts, principally the *Akbarnama*, *Tarrikh-e-Khandan-e-Timuria*, etc. In these, small or large-sized miniatures are the visual accounts of the daily and annual events in the palaces. Naturally, there was rejoicing and festivity on the occasion of the birth of a prince. Music, dance was normal. Now, for the first time, in these paintings, we see musicians playing on drums called the *Nakaras* or a number of trumpets (*Tuti*). Also there are men dancers in contrast to the many women dancers in the Jain schools. In the paintings of the *Akbarnama* and the *Tarrikh-e-Khandan-e-Timuria*, alongwith the paintings of a slightly earlier period, namely the *Tutinama*, two distinct schools of dance are in evidence. One seems to draw its inspiration from Iran or at least from the paintings relating to the dance in Persian miniatures. These are men and women in long flowing robes, high conical caps in standing positions which are diminished and their movements are reminiscent of their Iranian counterparts. Along side are miniatures of dancers who quite obviously represent an indigenous school of dancing which must have been prevalent in the countryside and in native courts. Quite often in a single painting, there are two different groups of dancers. We must also remember that one of Akbar's Generals had seized Mandu by defeating Baaz Bahadur and Roop Mati. Records tell us that as part of the loot were 350 dancers who were brought to Akbar's court. Undoubtedly some of these must have represented ancient traditions. In course of time, they were rehabilitated and perhaps it was this amalgam of the Persian and the Indian brought together in a court milieu which was responsible for the nascent beginning of a style of dance we recognise as Kathak. Concurrent in the sixteenth and seventeenth century to the beginning of the eighteenth century, the many courts and principalities of Indian princes and the dance drama traditions were inspired by the *Bhakti* movement and devoted to the cult of Rama and Krishna. In Uttar Pradesh was born Tulsidas who wrote the *Ramacharitmanas*, a work which was probably dramatised since it was written.



In Vrindavan met the countless *Bhaktas* and *Vaishnavites* from all parts of India who recreated the life of Krishna through tableaux called Jhankis, dance dramas called *Lilas* and dances called *Rasa*. *Ramcharitamanas* was the inspiration of the *Ramlilas*, the *Bhagavata Purana* and the *Gita Govinda* were the inspiration of the *Krishnalilas*. The Hindu princes and nobles, whether from Rajasthan or the Hills of Himachal or the Plateaus of Deccan, were devoted to these deities. Painters in their *atelier* drew inspiration from the *Ramalila* and *Krishnalila*, and the rich body of medieval poetry especially that of Surdas, Mira Bai, Keshav Das, and others. Into this was also brought all the elements of an earlier aesthetic namely that of the *naika* and the *nayika*, the seasons, the *ragamala* and the *baramasa*, generally called Rajasthan Pahari painting. This third group provides the richest source material for reconstructing a history of the dance stylistically called Kathak today.

As a result of the interaction of the Mughal courts and the Rajasthan courts the temples and the palaces of the princes, and the *bhaktas*, a new form came into being and this new form had connection with the temple and temple courtyard on the one hand and the palace and the princes on the other. In term of technique, some interesting changes took place. While in the Jaina paintings, the *ardhamandali* and the *urdhvajanu chari* and the *svastika chari* continue, in the paintings of the Mughal style, we find gradual absence of the *ardhamandali*. Instead, it is a standing erect position. We return, however, to this *ardhamandali* in the illustrations of the *Dasma skandha* of the *Bhagavata Purana* where Krishna dances with the gopis. We have also illustrations of Krishna dancing and playing on flute to the accompaniment of the *ektara* and *mridanga*. In most of these paintings, Krishna continues to have the *ardhamandli* position of the lower limbs and, even if the *hastas* are sometimes clumsily depicted the *hamsasya* is fairly clear. Occasionally, Krishna is seen with one leg erect and a flat *sama pada* foot and the other lifted in *urdhvajanu*. The musical accompaniment is of several kinds, but the percussion instrument is common to all of them. The accompanists are invariably women, one holding the *mridanga*, the second a big *jhanja* and the third holding the *kartala* or cymbals. Krishna himself holds a *vina* or *ektara*. In an interesting painting from Basohli, we find Krishna under a tree in *vidyudbhranta chari*. In these paintings, Krishna is shown dancing, surrounded by the *gopis* in a variety of poses, and wearing a *dhoti* and a half-sleeved upper garment Besides these, there are thousands of paintings depicting just secular dancing, or the female dancer in either a court or in a garden, sometimes accompanied by musicians. A stock motif is a dance of two women holding hands and each is in a very modified *urdhvajanu chari*. .

By about the sixteenth century, the tight *churidar pyjama* appears as a standard dress of the dancer. Even if she wears a full-skirted *lehanga*, the *churidar pyjama* below is clearly visible. From the half-skirt of Krishna, we move on to the full skirt of the women; the skirt always giving the suggestion of being transparent The anklets or the *nupur*, which are not seen in sculpture till a very late date.



become a common feature of the paintings of this period. Prior to the seventeenth century, the women danced to the accompaniment of the mridanga and the *manjira*. They sometimes hold pots on their head and hands and, occasionally, dance on plates under their feet .

After the seventeenth century, or from the eighteenth century onwards, we find a consistent depiction of the *tabla*, the two-barrelled drum. The two-barrelled drum is also held by women performers in a standing posture and only in the music scenes do we find that the *tabla* is played by women who are seated. Gradually, there is less and less adherence to the *ardhamandali* position and the dancer begins to have a straight and erect posture. We find that, instead of the demi *plie* or the out-turned knee position so characteristic of the dance-sculpture until the fourteenth century and also a significant feature of the miniature paintings of the early medieval period, the dancer has an erect posture. .

A great many paintings of the period are illustrations of the *ragas*, and the *raginis* on the one hand and the *nayikas* on the other. Amongst the *raginis* depicted in the form of dance-postures are the *nat narayani ragini*, *vasanta ragini* and *dipaka ragini*. In the *nat narayani ragini* it is usually only the female dancer who is presented. In the *vasanta ragini*, Krishna is depicted in his full splendour during spring with women and peacocks. The dancer is also seen sometimes amongst these playing Holi to the accompaniment of a few percussion instruments. There are many other figures seen spraying coloured water from spray guns. .

Although there are some accounts of the nature of dances in the chronicles of the Mughal courts, the most valuable is found in the *Aayin-e-Akbari*. There is, of course, a far larger body of material available on the development of music. From Amir Khusro onwards, many new developments took place in Indian music. In course of time, *Dhrupad* and *Khayal* emerge as the two principal modes. This, however, cannot be compared to musical compositions discussed in the context of Bharatanatyam. In the case of the latter, many musical compositions were created specifically for the dance. In the case of *Dhrupad* and *Khayal*, no such assertion can be made. Perhaps this also accounts for an absence of evidence in regard to dancers accompanying *Khayal* singers. One of the reasons for this was perhaps the great elaboration needed on the basic melodic line in north Indian music. The dancer could not be provided with the same type of opportunity for improvisation which the *varnam* as a musical composition provided to the *Bharatanatyam* dancer. The relationship was thus of a general nature. The dexterity and the intricacy of weaving new patterns on a given ascending and descending order of the *svaras* was replaced in dance by a most imposing and intricate execution of rhythmic patterns by the feet based on a metrical cycle. The *svarabol* or the *tan bol* of the *Khayal* was met by the mathematical permutations and combinations of the *tukra* and the *paran* in dancing.



The poetic compositions (*sahitya*) naturally, came to have a secondary position in this scheme. Nevertheless there was an important aspect of Indian music where it came close to dance. This was the *thumri* in north Indian music. The *thumri*, the *bhajan* and the *ghazal* of north Indian music were the counterparts of the *padams* and the *javalis* in Karnatak music and south Indian dance. In the *thumri*, the musician presented a particular state of emotion and elaborated it through variations on the same theme. In dance, the artist presented variations of the one line of poetry sung in a given *raga* and brought to it, through gesture, the same richness and variety which the musician was bringing to it through the musical note. The masters of the *thumri* and the *bhajan* became the masters of the *abhinaya* of north Indian dance and it is this *sahitya* which gave the dance style a literary content analogous to the repertoire of the other dance forms of India.

In recreating the history of Kathak, this background, however, disjointed it may seem, must not be forgotten. The classical distinctions between *lasya* and *tandava*, and between *nritya* and *abhinaya* were maintained by the Kathak exponent even when this dance was performed before kings and princes in the courts of Avadh. It must also be remembered that this dance-style was not only influenced but was actually given a direction by the Vaishnavite tradition of north India. The pure abstract design which this dance makes through rhythm was certainly conditioned by the court milieu or the milieu in which technical virtuosity was at a premium. But even at those moments, the dancer did not keep away from the *sahitya*. In the very process of making interpretative dancing an abstract design, the dancer never forgot that the abstract design was an invocation to God, which he or she might practise in solitude or collectively in a temple.

In moving to the court, the Hindu musician or dancer of the temple made suitable adjustments in repertoire technique and manner of execution. In the court, the Kathak *virtuoso* gave up the literary content in preference to a demonstration of sheer technique. Somewhere, in the unsaid part of the performance, the Hindu myth and legend still remained and communicated itself in the interpretative portions of the dance.

### Kathak Technique

Kathak, like miniature painting, is two-dimensional in character. It conceives of space only in straight lines and does not attempt to give a three-dimensional effect so characteristic of the reliefs in Indian sculpture. In the dance, there is only a front-back treatment of space. Even when pirouettes are executed, it is along a central vertical median from which no shifts or deflections take place. The human form is conceived of as a straight line and there are very few deviations from the vertical median or the *Brahmasutra*. The weight of the body in the initial stances of the dance is equally divided and the knees are not flexed.



The feet, in this position, are invariably in the *samapada*; the first sequence are also executed in the *sama pada* position. In no other style is the flat-foot dance so important as in Kathak. One of the reasons for this is obviously the minute footwork which Kathak demands. The complex footwork can be executed precisely only through a delicate balance of weight on the flat foot. When the Kathak dancer moves in front, she does not place the *anchita* foot forward (heel on the ground) as in Bharatanatyam or the *Kunchita* foot (toe on the ground) as in Manipuri. Instead, she places the flat foot forward lightly, carrying the weight of the body along rather than shifting the weight tersely. .

The Kathak dancer's alphabet and vocabulary of dance movements are not built on the principle of either foot contacts, or leg extensions, or knee flexions as in Bharatanatyam. Nor are the cadences built on the principle of weaving patterns in circles, semicircles or figures of 8 of the entire body as in Manipuri. The cadences are directly conditioned by the metrical cycles (*talas*) on which rhythmic variations can be executed. Thus, what is known as the *tattakara* in Kathak is the ability of the dancer to execute a variety of rhythmic patterns (*jatis*) on a basic metrical cycle (*tala*).

### The Movements

Torso movements are also known to this dance style, but the torso is neither conceived of as a single unit as in Bharatanatyam, nor is it divided into two units, the chest and the waist, as in Manipuri. Instead, only the shoulder line changes its angle which appears to be a manipulation of the upper torso. This treatment gives the dance style its peculiar fluidity and some of its characteristic torso postures. The shoulder line and its deflection (with one shoulder depressed and the other raised) is used at its best in the execution of movement known as the *Kasak masak*.

The movements of the arms are definite, but they do not make any single geometrical pattern. In the basic stance, the dancer holds a variation of the *hamsasya hasta* above the head; the second arm is extended sideways or in front and is slightly rounded. The *hasta* is *hamsasya* at the waist level. In this basic stance with a *svastika* foot (crossing at the back), the *mukuta* of Krishna is represented by the right hand and the holding of Radha on his left side by the other. The same stance, when it was performed in a different milieu, acquired a more secular character and came to be known as the entrance stance which, at its worst, becomes somewhat coquettish. There are many *hastas* known to this dance style, although the oral tradition does not accept the terminology for these *hastas* as is prevalent in the other classical styles of India. The *mushti*, the *sikhara*, the *hamsasya*, the *chandrakala*, and the *alapadma* are common. .

The characteristic feature of the dance style is its jumps and pirouettes. These, in the *Natyasastra* or *Abhinaya Darpana* terminology, are the *utplavanas* and



*bhramaris*. In no other dance style are both feet lifted together in a simple jump as they are in Kathak. In the other classical dance-forms, there is invariably a pattern in the air in which one foot is nearer the ground than the other. In the elevation, there is a feeling of covering space through a leap or jump. In Kathak, on the other hand, there is only a release from gravity, usually in place and there is no attempt on the part of the dancer to cover space forward or backward through the process of the jump. In such movement, the jump itself assumes significance, rather than being a means of getting to a new posture. In the *bhramaris*, we find that the Kathak dancer maintains the axis of the body by using one foot as a centre and the other foot to make a circle. The static foot represents the centre and the dynamic foot is the arm of a compass drawing swiftly the circumference of a circle. The pirouettes or the *chakkara*, as they are known in popular terminology, are usually the finale of a dance sequence. They are usually grouped together in a series of three, as in the *araddis* of Bharatanatyam. .

Face movements are limited, but great emphasis is placed on the movements of the eyebrows. The use of the eyebrows for the *lasyanga* is a characteristic feature of this dance style. In the movements of the neck, Kathak shares much with Bharatanatyam. The horizontal, side-to-side movement of the neck, described as the *sundari* neck movement in the *Abhinaya Darpana*, is used most frequently in these two dance styles. .

### The Repertoire

A discussion of the technique of Kathak cannot be divorced from a discussion of its repertoire. In fact, portions of the technique form the repertoire and it is only recently that separate dance compositions have been choreographed as numbers of the pure dance (*nritta*) or mime (*abhinaya*).

Kathak, like the other dance styles, can be divided into two main parts, namely *nritta* and *abhinaya* on the one hand, and *tandava* and *lasya* on the other. While the definitions of *nritta* and *abhinaya* applicable to the other styles are also applicable to Kathak, it is not very easy to apply the classification of *tandava* and *lasya* to actual movements in this dance style. *Tandava* and *lasya* are applied here to the type of mnemonics which are played on the *tabla* or executed by the feet rather than through any types of distinctive tension or relaxed movement .

The *nritta* portions are presented in a sequence beginning with the traditional entry, known as the *amada*. It is commonly believed that the *amada* was preceded by an invocation to god Ganesa. This was known as the Ganesa *Vandana* or the *Ganesa parana*, which perhaps went out of vogue for some time and was replaced by what has been termed as the *amada*. The former has now returned into practice. Through the *amada*, the dancer makes his entry into the stage and the invocation to the Hindu god Ganesa was changed into the *salami*



or the court salutation. The *amada* is usually composed in the medium tempo a metrical cycle of 16 beats (*trital*). The mnemonics of the *amada* are set and usually restricted to the *bols* called ta tai tai tat. ae tai, tai, tat. The *amada* ends with a short pirouette movement. The dancer takes a static position again after this dramatic entry, to display movements of different parts of the body. The *thata* is the Kathak dancer's way of presenting the different movements of the *angas* and the *upangas*. Sometimes the *thata* precedes the *amada*.

These entry numbers are soon followed by the presentation of pure dance patterns known as the *tora*, *tukra* and *parana*. These are successive rhythmic patterns, named so either according to the varying degree of the complexity of the rhythmic pattern or on account of the mnemonics used, that is, whether they are of the *tabla* or of the *pakhavaj* (drum). The *tukra* is perhaps the simplest variety where the mnemonics are of the *tabla* and it emphasises one particular type of pattern which is usually terse and uncomplicated by quarter beats or two-thirds beats. Sometimes, people have defined the *toras* analogous to the *toras* of the sitar where clusters of sound patterns are presented in a given raga structure. In either case, the distinguishing feature of the *tora* is its formalized pattern, taking only a few types of mnemonics into consideration.

The *tora* is followed by the *tukra*, which is often presented as the *chakkardar tukra*. These *tukras* are built in the same manner as the *tirmanams* of the *varnam* in Bharatanatyam. The dancer begins with a rhythmic pattern seemingly slow and in *vilambit laya*.. This is followed by presenting some mnemonic in a different tempo and then presenting them finally in a double or a triple *laya*. The analogy with the three *kalas* of Bharatanatyam is not exact, because here there is a successive progression and the relationship of the third *laya* to the first *laya* can vary greatly. The entire sequence is repeated usually three times or in multiples of three. The structure is thus built on an acute mathematical sense and the dexterity of the artiste lies in building up this structure either from the first beat of the rhythmic pattern or from any of the subsequent beats, the unalterable principle being, of course, that the dancer must end on the last beat of the metrical cycle or the first beat of the new cycle, but mostly the former.

The *parana* is the next variety and it has been identified normally as dance pattern executed to the mnemonics of the *pakhavaj*. These are usually mnemonics with aspirant sounds heavy and echoing, as opposed to the non-aspirant sounds like *tat*, *trik*, *ti*, etc. of the *tukra*. The sounds are *dha*, *dhigi*, *dhilang*, etc.

The *nritta* technique of Kathak could also be covered under these broad categories. However, there are subdivisions and re-classification of the *tukras*, the *toras* and the *paranas*. One such re-classification is the composition which comprises sounds of various percussion instruments known to north Indian music, such as, the *nagara*, *pakhavaj*, *jhang*, *manjira*, duff and *tabla*. It has also



been defined as the category which has a combination of the *tandava* and the *lasya* mnemonics. Thus, in these compositions mnemonics such as *nagi*, *thari*, *kita*, *thak*, *thun*, *jhanak jhanak*, etc. are common. Similarly, there are *tukras* which are known as the *sangeet ka tukras*. These are compositions usually with mnemonics of one syllable or at best two syllables each, but with some musical quality about them. A common *sangeet ka tukra* from the Jaipur school is *dring jagira drig jagira*. The number has also been defined as in *bol* which is sung. It seems that the first definition would perhaps be more appropriate. As opposed to the *sangeet ka tukra*, there is another rhythmical composition known as the *natvari* or just *nach ka tukra*. In *natvari*, the dancer attempts to present sounds of the anklets only. The typical *natvari bols* are *dhig*, *dha*, *dhig*, *dhig*, *tram*, etc. It must be remembered that none of these compositions is danced to *svara* patterns as in a *jatisvaram* of Bharatanatyam. They are similar to the various *korvais* which a Bharatanatyam dancer executes to the recurrent singing of a *pallavi* or *anupallavi* in a *tillana*.

The *nritya* portions of Kathak are presented to a repetitive melodic line known as the *nagma*. The recurrent line serves the same function as the tonic in a *raga*. Both the drummer and the dancer weave endless variety of rhythmic permutations and combinations on this fixed melodic line. Very few numbers are known to Kathak which aim at or achieve a *svara* to *svara* synchronization of dance movement and musical sound. The synchronization is all in the sphere of the metrical cycle. The *tarana* may be cited as a single exception. Here, the dancer does weave patterns to the accompaniment of *svaras* of the *tarana*.

One type of composition in Kathak does not fall under the category either of pure *nritya* or of *abhinaya*, but may be called *nritya*. The *Ganesa Vandana*, about which we have spoken earlier, and the *kavita* are two types of poetic compositions to which the dancer performs both *nritya* and elementary *abhinaya*. The principle on which this particular type of composition work is the *matrika* or the *varnika chhanda* or poetry. The poetic metre guides the recitative form and is set to an appropriate *tala*. It is to the poetic forms so sung that the dance is performed at the *sawaiya*, the *ghanakshari*, etc. Very often, a purely mnemonic pattern is added to the end of this poetic piece. The dancer, thus, interprets through gestures the words of the poetic line and then executes a *nritya* cadence on the mnemonic portions. Occasionally, the last word of the poetic composition is repeated several times, again in multiples of three, so that the dancer often ends in a repetitive pirouette in the name of either Radha or Krishna.

The discussion of the *nritya* portions of Kathak would not be complete without a mention of two other aspects, namely the *parhant* and the *tattakara*.

The Kathak dancer invariably recites the *bols* of the dance cadences. This is different from what the Bharatanatyam dancer does while executing a *tirmanam*.



It is only the *nattuvanar* (dance conductor) who recites the *bols* in a Bharatanatyam recital, but in Kathak it has been considered an essential part of the Kathak dancer's demonstration. The recitation or the *parhant* becomes important on account of the great emphasis laid on the accented and unaccented parts of the mnemonics. It is important also because the dancer, through recitations, almost rehearses the exact time intervals in the dance cadence before actually executing them through her feet. It must also be remembered that the mnemonics of the *tabla* or the *pakhavaj* player may well repeat all the *bols* which had been earlier recited by the dancer.

The second and last aspect, namely, the *tattakara* is another way of presenting the dancer's great mastery over rhythmic patterns. The dancer can, on a given metrical cycle, execute fractional intervals of the beats of a single cycle. This is done by a cross time-scanning or by accelerating or slowing this scanning by fractional count. Thus, against a basic pattern of 16 beats, the dancer may execute a pattern of 12 beats by slowing the fractional count or a pattern of 24 beats by increasing the count or making it double to 32 or treble to 48. Normally, the dancer is taught to improvise on a 16 beat pattern in such a manner that all the other *talas* can be set to the basic 16 beat pattern. The dexterity and precision of the dancer lies in her absolute synchronization with the *sama* of the original metrical pattern. The end of the *tattakara* portion of the demonstration is a challenge also from the point of view of perfect manipulation of weight. In the very process of executing these rhythmic patterns, the dancer tries to control the sound of the ankle bells and, can restrict the sound to the jingling of one or two bells on her ankles or the jingling of the entire hundred to two hundred bells. This is indeed a challenging part of the dancer's training, because while executing these patterns and maintaining the right axis of the body and giving varying emphasis on the sound of the bells, the dancer must be absolutely static from the torso upwards. This is a difficult discipline for the dancer, because the feet, when tired, have a tendency of seeking relief through a free use of the pelvic region. The charm of the dancer is in the seemingly static figure producing dynamic sounds.

There are many other classifications and types of compositions known to the *nritya* technique of Kathak but, they all belong to the oral traditions of the families.

### Abhinaya

In Indian dance, the *abhinaya* is invariably known as the dancer's ability to interpret words set to music. Such interpretation of a word through movement distinguishes the classical tradition from folk forms. The degree of interpretative stylization through *hastas* and facial expressions (*mukhaj abhinaya*) gives each dance style its distinctive character. In Kathak, the *abhinaya* portions have evolved out of many dance traditions known to Central India. The *rasadharis* of



Mathura and Vrindavan, the dancers of Gujarat and dance kirtans of Bihar and of the Maithili region are the precursors of the literary content of the kathak dance. The lyric, closely associated with the Vaishnavite tradition, formed the basis and whether it was Jayadeva's *astapadis* or Vidyapati's *padavalis* or the *bhajans* of Mira Bai and Surdas, the approach was identical.

To the accompaniment of the song, the dancer presents meaning through gesture. While it is not conclusively proven that Kathak as evolved in the court of Wajid Ali Shah deliberately discarded this religious content, in the practice until quite recently, the literary lyric had come to have secondary place. A collection of the *sahitya* (literature) of the dance-style from scattered source in Central India would perhaps bring to light a sizeable literature of the dance. In practice, the *sahitya* gave way to the abstract playing on the *sarangi* of the recurrent melodic line without the words.

Kathak conceives of *abhinaya* under two broad headings. The first is known as the *gatabhava* or just *bhava* and the second as *abhinaya* proper. The *gatabhava* is executed without the help of words. The dancer makes another entry into the acting arena by what is known as the *gatabhava* and *gatanikas*. After this entry, she presents very brief pieces based on the life of Krishna and the *gopis*. For example, she may present only the episode of a *gopi* covering her face with a veil and then seeing Krishna, or it may be a small episode of filling the water-pitcher, or it may be Krishna in the role of the child stealing butter, known as *makhanchori*. These small episodes can be enlarged into slightly longer stories, such as the killing of the serpent Kaliya by Krishna, or the coming of the deluge in Braja and Krishna coming and protecting the populace by lifting the Govardhan hillock. Sometimes, these *gatabhavas* are also known as *artha gata* but this is a term which is inaccurately applied because the *artha gata* would have some meaning only if it was an interpretation of the word.

Closely related to the *gatabhava* is the presentation of the *nayikabheda* by the Kathak dancer. The Kathak dancer presents different types of the *nayikas* not through *abhinaya* to a song, but only the tune of the *lehara*. All the eight *nayikas* of the Indian tradition are known to the Kathak dancer and she may present them as a separate number or as different *gatas*. All these are presentations of *bhava*, and the variations of a dominant mood could be endless.

However, the principle of the transitory states (*sancharibhava*) is seen at its best in what is known as the *abhinaya* proper in Kathak. The *abhinaya* now word-bound, is performed to different types of poetic and musical compositions. There is evidence to prove that *abhinaya* was performed by the *rasadhari* dancers to the singing of the *dhruvpad* and the *prabandh*. These compositions went out of vogue but were replaced by two other compositions, namely the *hori* and the *dhamar*. The *hori* is a set composition of north Indian music which is usually sung to the *deepachandi tala*. The lyric revolves round the theme of the Holi



festival. The *dhamar* takes its name from the *tala* of 14 beats called *dhamar* and is usually sung or performed in a mood of obeisance. The Kathak dancer also presents the *dhamar* in this manner; the learning of various rhythmical compositions in the *dhamar* song and *tala* is essential for her. The great masters of the Kathak dancer, Maharaj Bindadin and his brother Kalka, were composers of *thumris*, *bhajans* and *padas*. These *bhajans* and *padas* were written specifically for the dance and it is clear from their wording that the writers were providing words for movements. Many fine *bhajans* have come down to the present generation and they may be equated with the *gita* and the *kirtan* of Karnatak music.

The richest part of the *abhinaya* numbers is the *thumri*. The musical composition has been the Kathak dancer's solid foundation for *abhinaya*. The Kathak dancer interprets the word, sometimes the entire line, sometimes only the word and sometimes the nuances of the word as interpreted through her vocal rendering of the *thumri*. The improvisations which are displayed on a given line of poetry sung in this style are seen to be believed. In a given framework, the singer can present several variations and the dancer can also execute as many variations in the content. This makes great demands on the imaginative faculty of the dancer who has to represent, through movement, many analogies and images which communicate the basic idea contained in the word. A simple word like *path* can be interpreted in the appropriate context as the milky way, or as the auspicious parting of a woman's hair, or the *path* of the collyrium of her eyes, etc. Naturally, the rhythmic footwork is not important, and, even if the dancer is not sitting down and interpreting the song, there is hardly any movement of the feet. It is only through the movement of the hands, the eyes, the eyebrows etc. that the dancer presents the entire gamut of feelings and emotions possible for a particular *sthayibhava*. It would not be too much to assume that the vitality of Kathak dance has remained undiminished, because the *thumri* on the one hand and the *tala* on the other provided the dancer with solid pillars around which variations could be built in both the *nritta* and the *abhinaya* portions.

The *dadra* is another type of musical composition which is used for *abhinaya* in Kathak. It derives its name from the *tala* of the same name, which is of two units of three beats each. This has been another favourite musical composition on which a great deal of interpretative dancing in Kathak has been developed.

In the more tradition, the Kathak dancer has been a solo dancer. Here again, she is presented not as an actor, but as a narrator. In this respect, there is a very close affinity between all the styles of classical dancing other than Kathakali.

During the last two decades there have been many attempts at utilising Kathak for presenting dance dramas. Sri Birju Maharaj has enlarged the traditional Kathak by choreography group dances. The form of the dance has also undergone many significant changes during the last ten years.







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# History of Dance

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*Nati—Pataliputra (Mauryan)*



*Dancing girl—Mohenjodaro*



*Dance scene  
from  
Prasenajit pillar—  
Barhut*





*Musicians and dancers: scene depicting the descent of Buddha—Amaravati*

*Dance panel from Pawaya  
—Gwalior (Gupta period)*







*Dance scene—Aurangabad caves*

*Dance panel—frieze from Sikar*







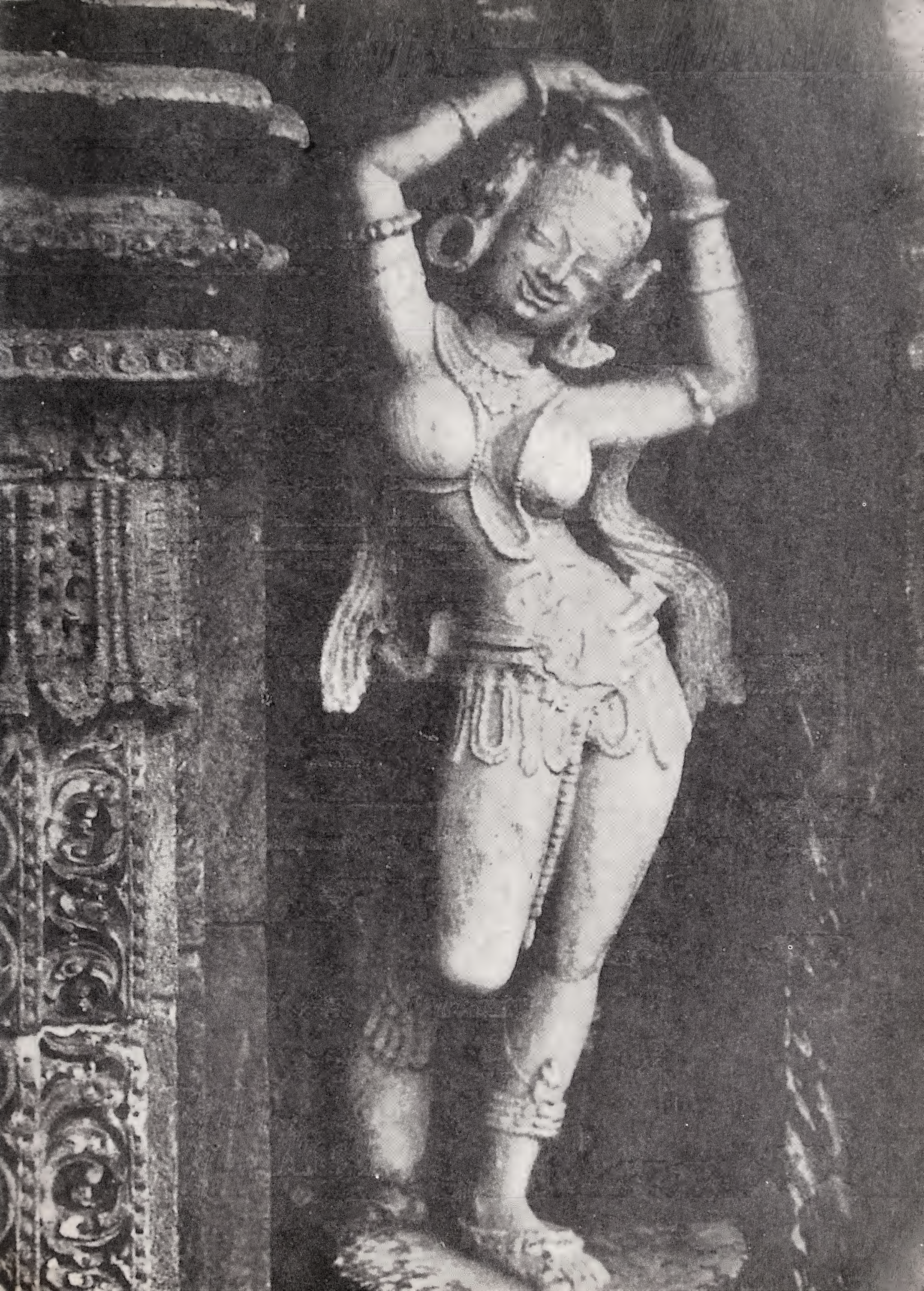
*Dancers from Makarand*

*Dance panel from Mukteswar—Bhubaneswar*



*Right  
Dancer :  
Lingaraja Temple  
—Bhubaneswar*









*Dance panel : Ramappa Temple—Palampet*

*Karanas : Gopuram—Chidambaram*







*Top & Bottom  
Dancers : Devi Temple—Chidambaram*





*Dancer : Devi Temple—Chidambaram*



**Karanas** : Sarangapani Temple—Kumbakonam





*Dancer : Sittanavassal*





Marginal Figure :  
Kalpasutra Devasona Pada

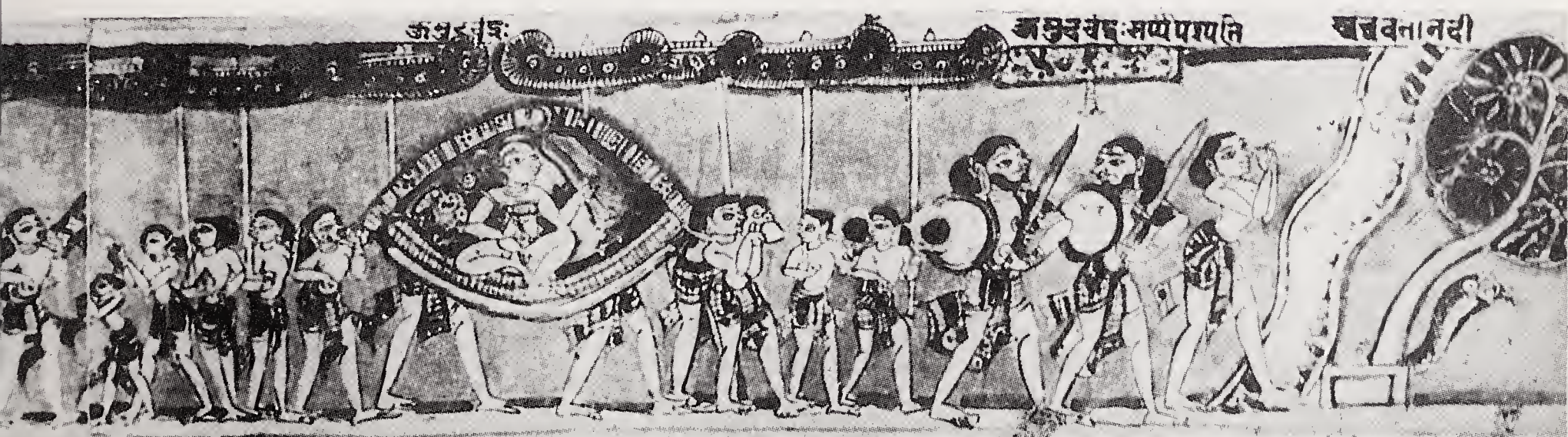


Book Cover : Pattika of Kumud Mudra Chandra

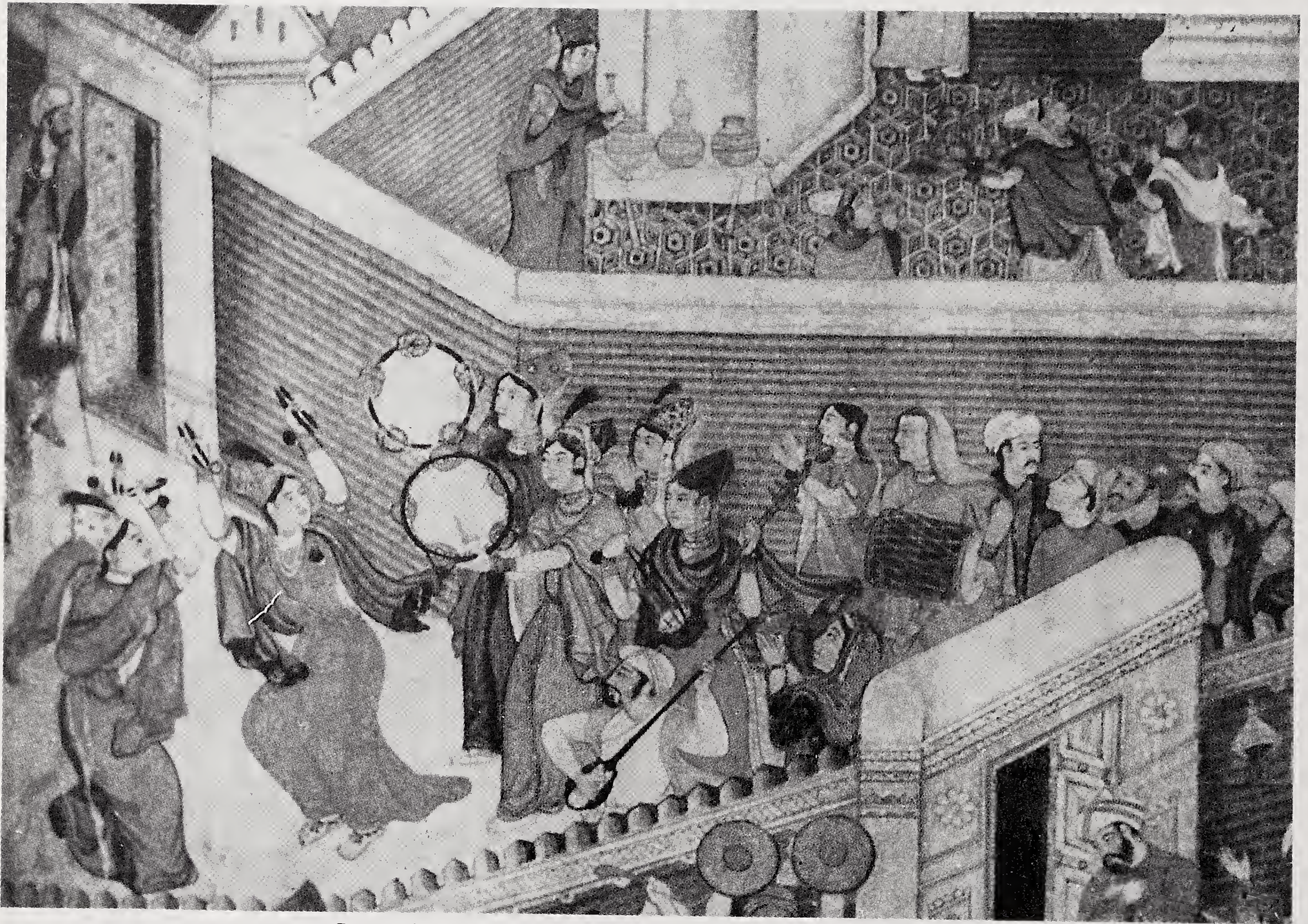




Marginal Figure :  
Kalpasutra Devasano Pada







*Dance from Tarikh-e-Khandan-e-Timuria C. 1574-1594 A.D.*





*Dance in Court—Kishangarh C-1750-A.D.*





*A dancer in a baidrak Oudh Company School, 19 Cent. A.D.*



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# Bharatanatyam

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*Basic position : ardhamandali*





Adavu : Tat tai taha—*Balasaraswati*



Basic Adavu : Tayum datta—*S.V. Lalita*





*Adavu, typical leg extension : Tat tai tam  
—S.V. Lalita*



*Adavu : Tayum datta—S.V. Lalita*



*Tayum-dutta*





*Svastika hands : Yamini Krishnamurti*

*Typical elevation : talāṅgakuṭā*







A nritta sequence:  
Lalata Tilaka—Kamala



A nritta sequence:  
—Yamini Krishnamurty





*Full mandali: A. sarada*





*Parvati in Kumarasambhavam—Rukmini Devi*



*A nritta sequence—Shanta Rao*







*Abhinaya sequence—A. Sarada*



*Gesture for king—Pushpa Makhijani*

*Left  
Abhinaya : Yasoda caressing the cow  
—Rukmini Devi*



*Nataraj pose—Gayatri Devi*





*Bow and Arrow—  
Sonal Mansingh*



*Abhinaya—Shanta Rao*





*Abhinaya—Mrinalini Sarabhai*



*Abhinaya—Shanta Rao*



*Abhinaya—Mrinalini Sarabhai*









*A child he is not*



*I went forward to gather him in my arms*



*And when I clasped him  
to my bosom*

## ABHINAYA SEQUENCE—BALASARASWATI

*Like husband who had taken  
me as his wedded wife*



*O' the strange wonder  
that this may be so*



*He kissed me*







*I was embarrassed and turned away*



*A boy he is not*



*Take him to be a boy*

Abhinaya  
T. Balasaraswati









*Balasaraswati : abhinaya*





*Balasaraswati : abhinaya*





*Balasaraswati : abhinaya*

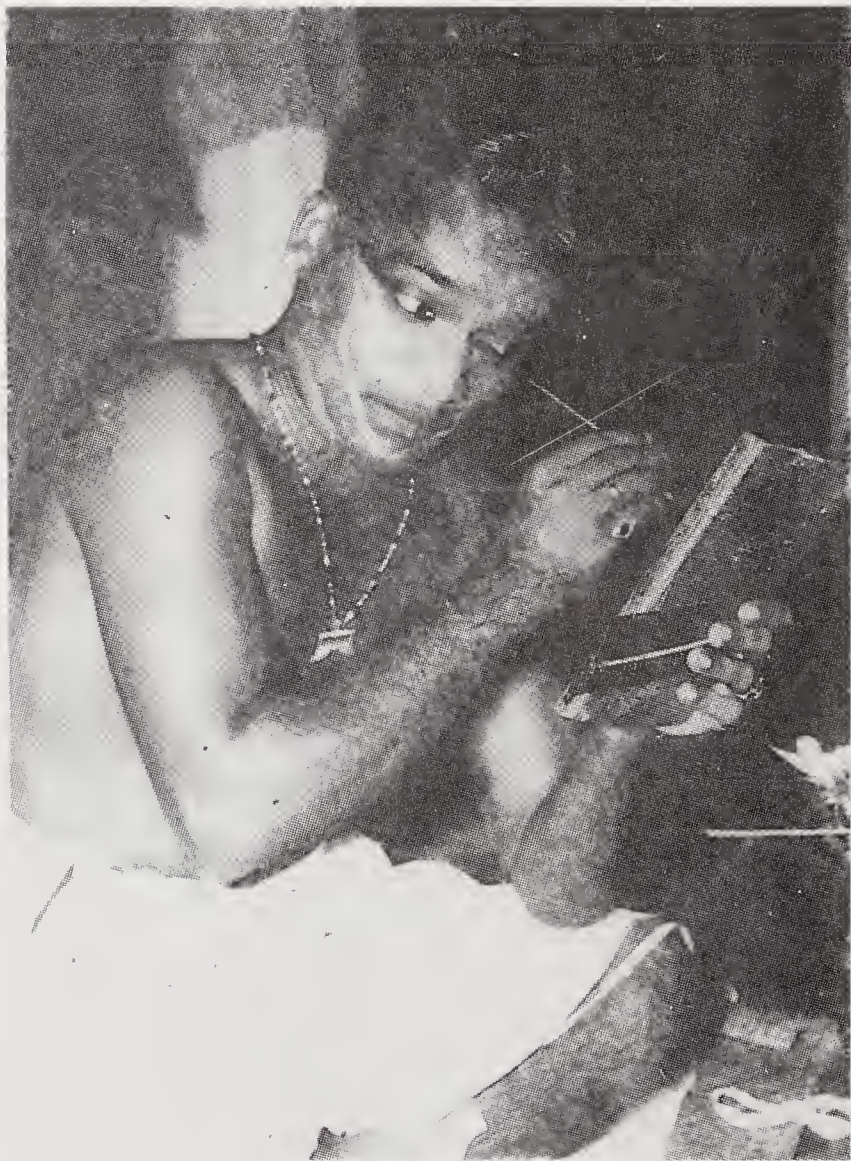


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Kathakali

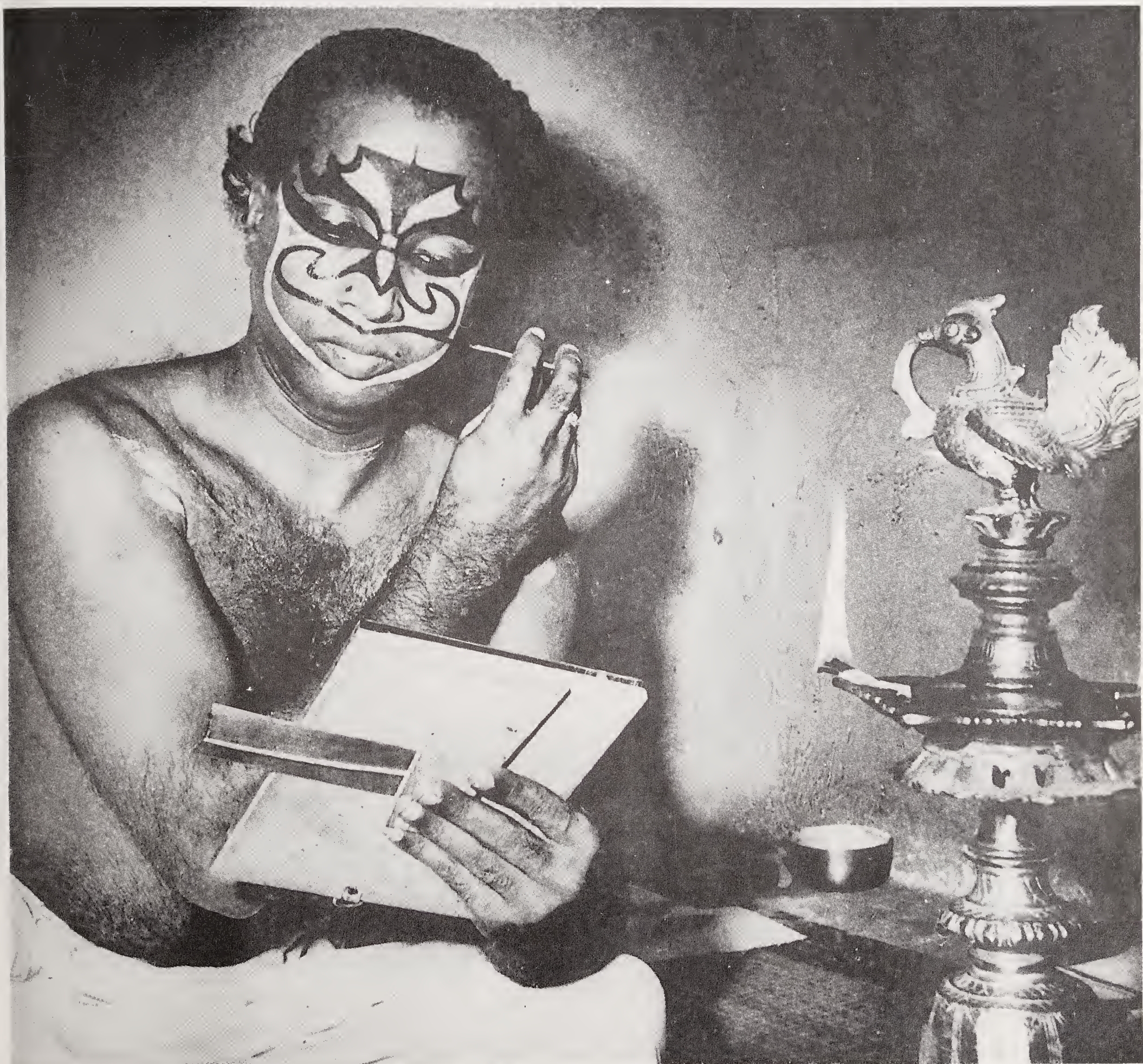
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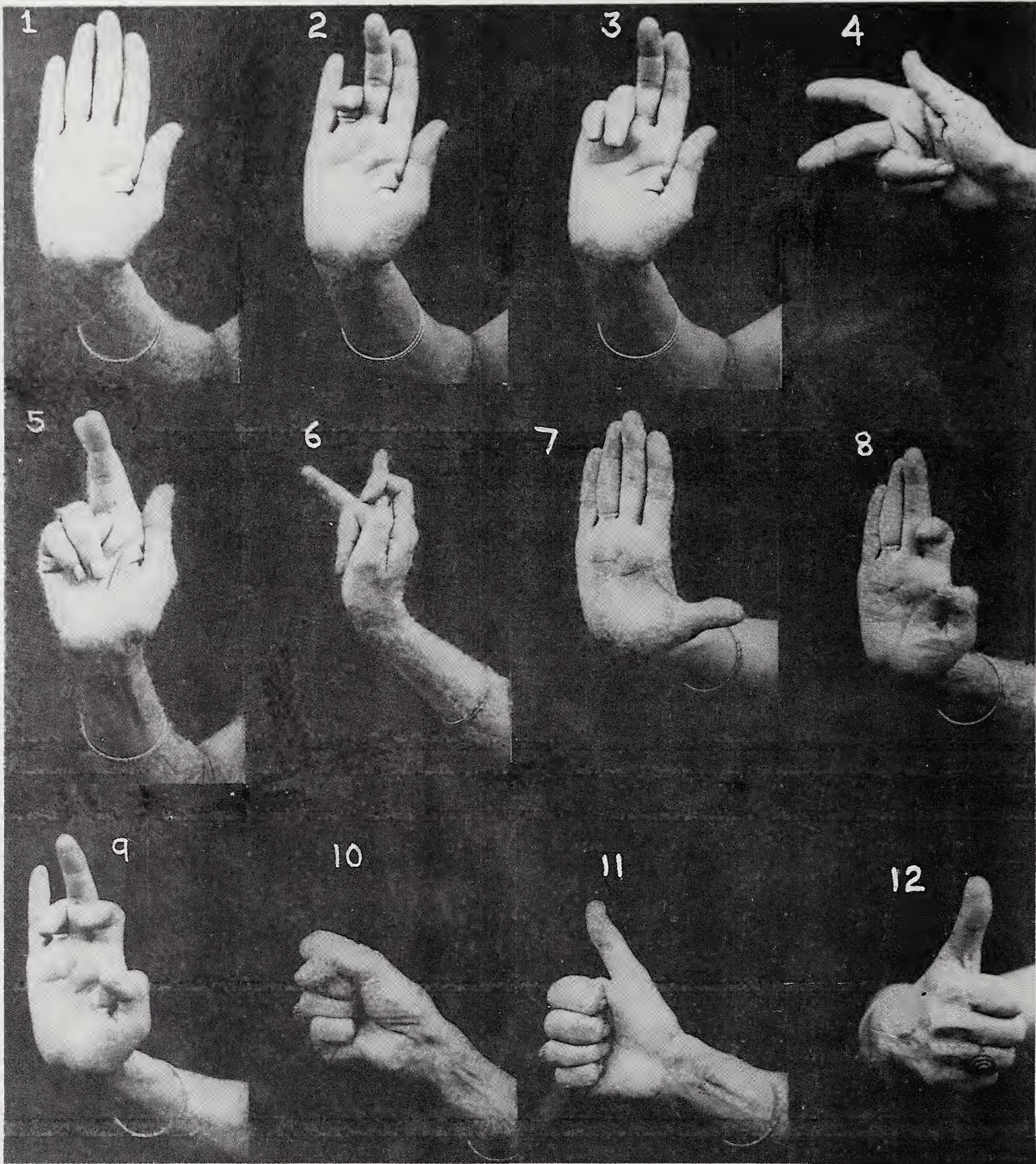
*Make-up : Ramanakutty*





*Kathakali makeup—Chathunni Panickar*







13



14



15



16



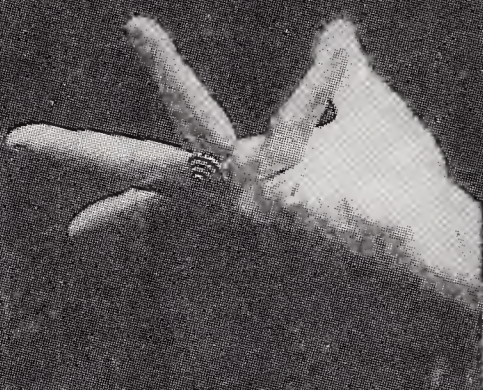
17



18



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25



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28



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32



33



34



35



36





- |                 |                 |                           |
|-----------------|-----------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Pataka       | 13. Kapittha    | 25. Mrgasirsa (variation) |
| 2. Tripataka    | 14. Kapittha    | 26. Vyaghra               |
| 3. Ardhapataka  | 15. Katakamukha | 27. Hamsasya (variation)  |
| 4. Kartarimukha | 16. Katakamukha | 28. Catura                |
| 5. Kartarimukha | 17. Suci        | 29. Sarpasirsa            |
| 6. Kataka       | 18. Alapadma    | 30. Urnanabha             |
| 7. Ardhaacandra | 19. Alapadma    | 31. Urnanabha             |
| 8. Arala        | 20. Alapadma    | 32. Urnanabha             |
| 9. Sukatunda    | 21. Hamsasya    | 33. Vardhamanaka          |
| 10. Musti       | 22. Padmakosa   | 34. Mukula                |
| 11. Sikhara     | 23. Padmakosa   | 35. Tamracuda             |
| 12. Sikhara     | 24. Mrgasirsa   | 36. Kangula               |

Mayura

Candrakala

Simhamukha

Bhramara

Candrakala

Hamsapaksa

Trisula

Sandamsa

Candrakala\*

---

\* Not illustrated





*Saree dance  
—Minal Devi and Rupande*



*Krishna in Geetagovindam  
—Karunakaran*





Nritta poses—*Shanta Rao*





Paccha: A full makeup of the character



Krishna

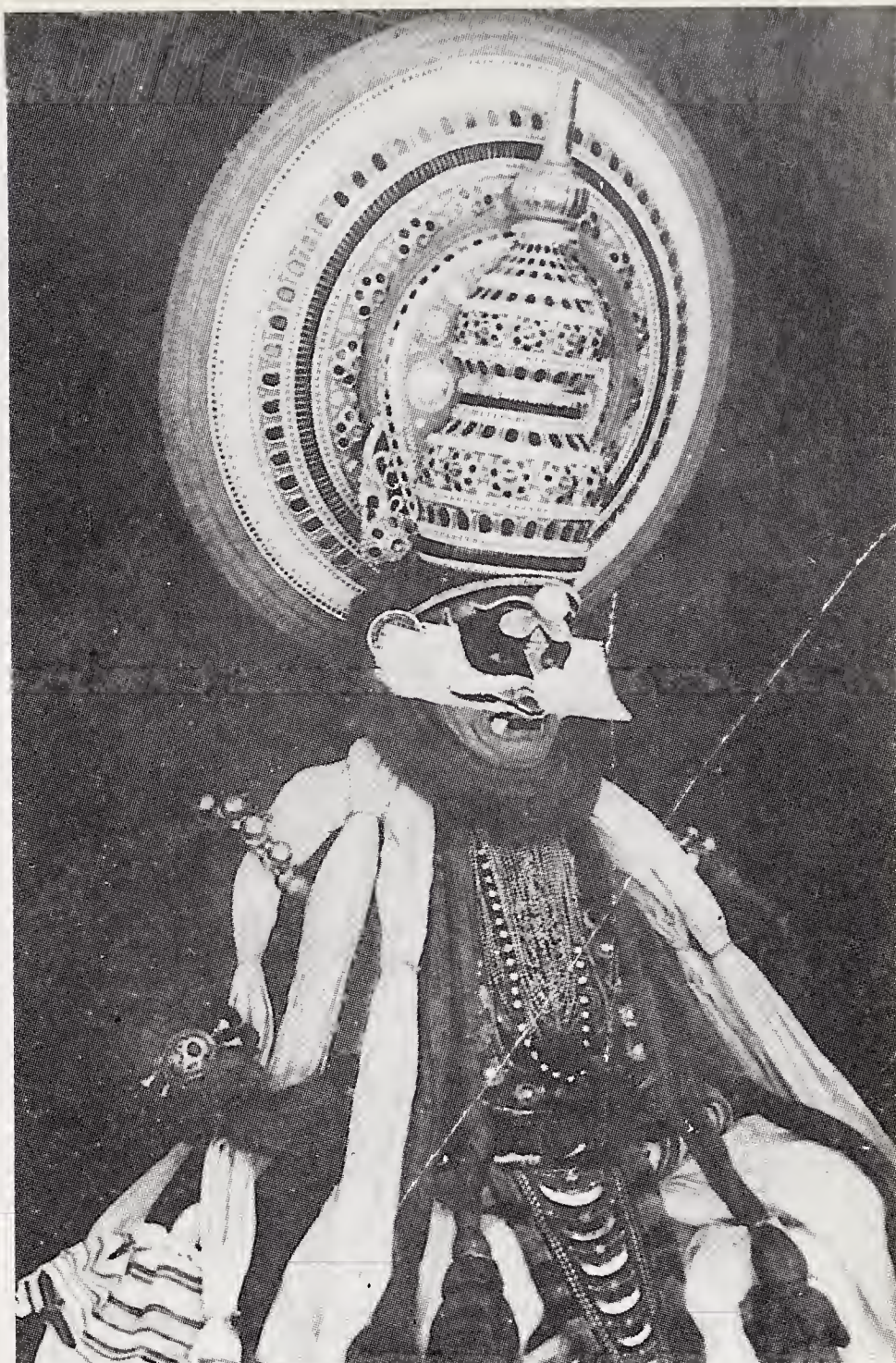


Paccha—like character : A closeup





*Katti in a combination of heroism and evil*



*Thadi : Makeup for Dusshasana*



*Kirata : the costume for hunter*





Hanuman

Right below  
Parasurama challenging Rama  
Scene from **Ramayana**

Lava and Kusa capturing Hanuman : Scene from **Ramayana**





Ravana slaying Jatayu  
—Scene from **Ramayana**







Hanuman

Right below  
Parasurama challenging Rama  
Scene from **Ramayana**

Lava and Kusa capturing Hanuman : Scene from **Ramayana**







Ravana slaying Jatayu  
—Scene from **Ramayana**







Slaying of Hiranyakasipu—Scene from Prahlada Charitam

*Draupadi reminding Krishna of her oath*







*Bhima's fight with Dusshasana*



*Bhima killing Dusshasana*



*Raudra Bhima possessed with  
the spirit of Narasimha : Ramanakutty*



*Chattuni—  
Panickar*





**ABHINAYA :  
GURU KUNJUKURUP:**







**Guru Kunjukurup:  
Abhinaya:**





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Orissi

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*Pratibha Jena Chauka*

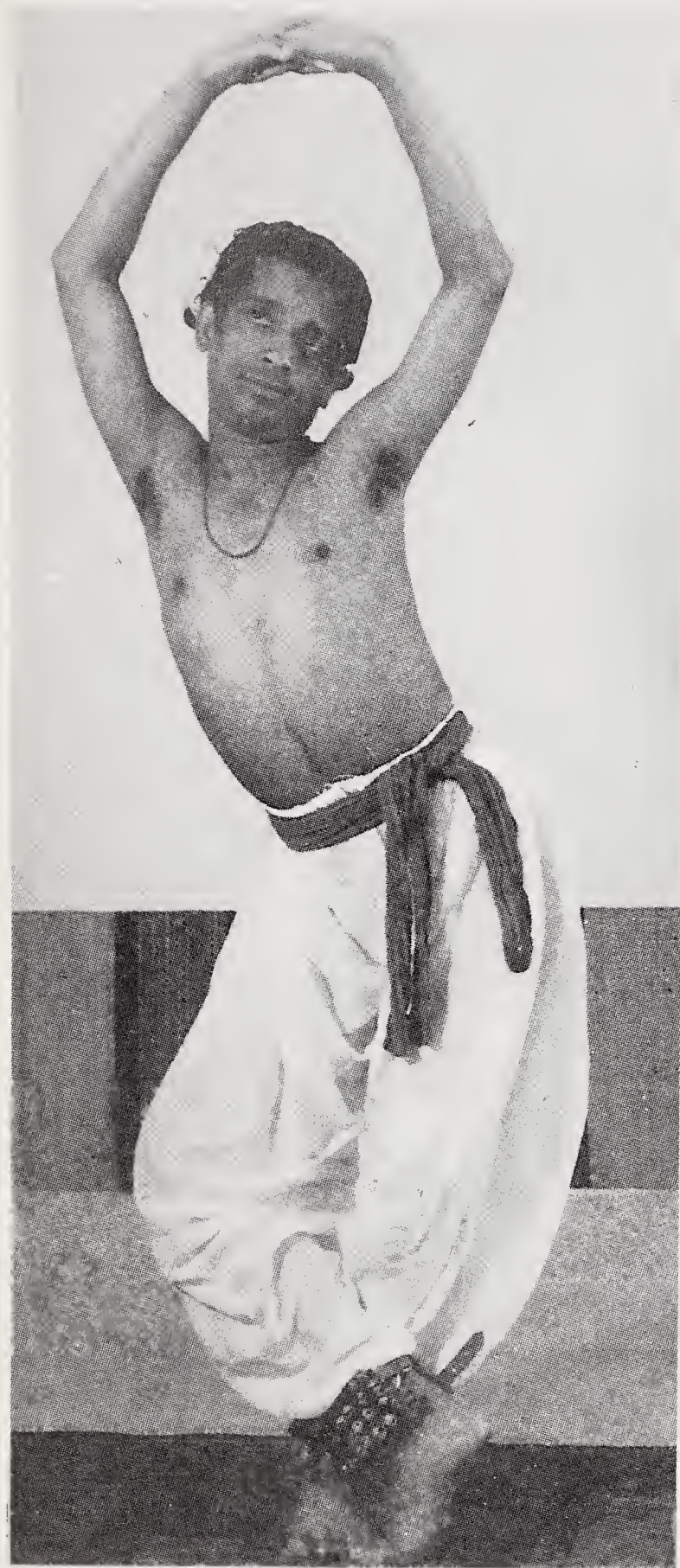


Tribhangi  
—Debu Das





Mardala—*Debu Das*



Aalsa—*Debu Das*



Narasimha avatar—*Debu Das*



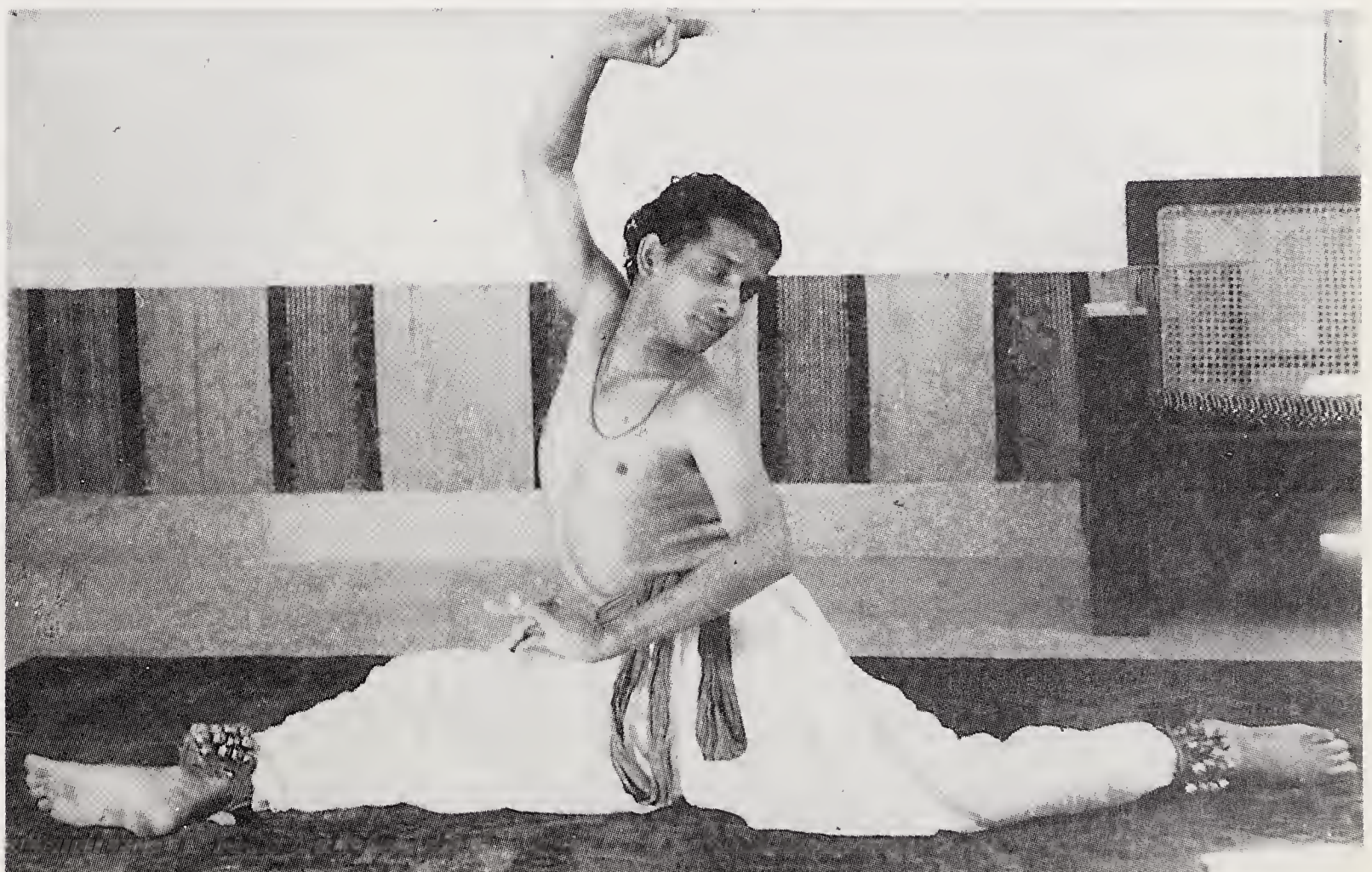
Tribhangi—*Debu Das*



Dhampada—*Debu Das*



Chira mudra—*Debu Das*







Orissi—*Kapota hasta*—Surendra nath Jena



Abhinaya : *Waiting for Krishna*—Kumkum



Orissi—*Kumkum*





Salabhanjika—Sanjukta Panigrahi



Salabhanjika—Sanjukta Panigrahi



The Lamp—Sanjukta Panigrahi



Bhangi  
—Indrani Rehman







Orissi—*sitting posture*  
—*Sonal Mansingh*



Bhangi  
—*Indrani Rehman*





Abhinaya : *Madhavi Mudgal*





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Manipuri

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Pung : Mahabir Singh





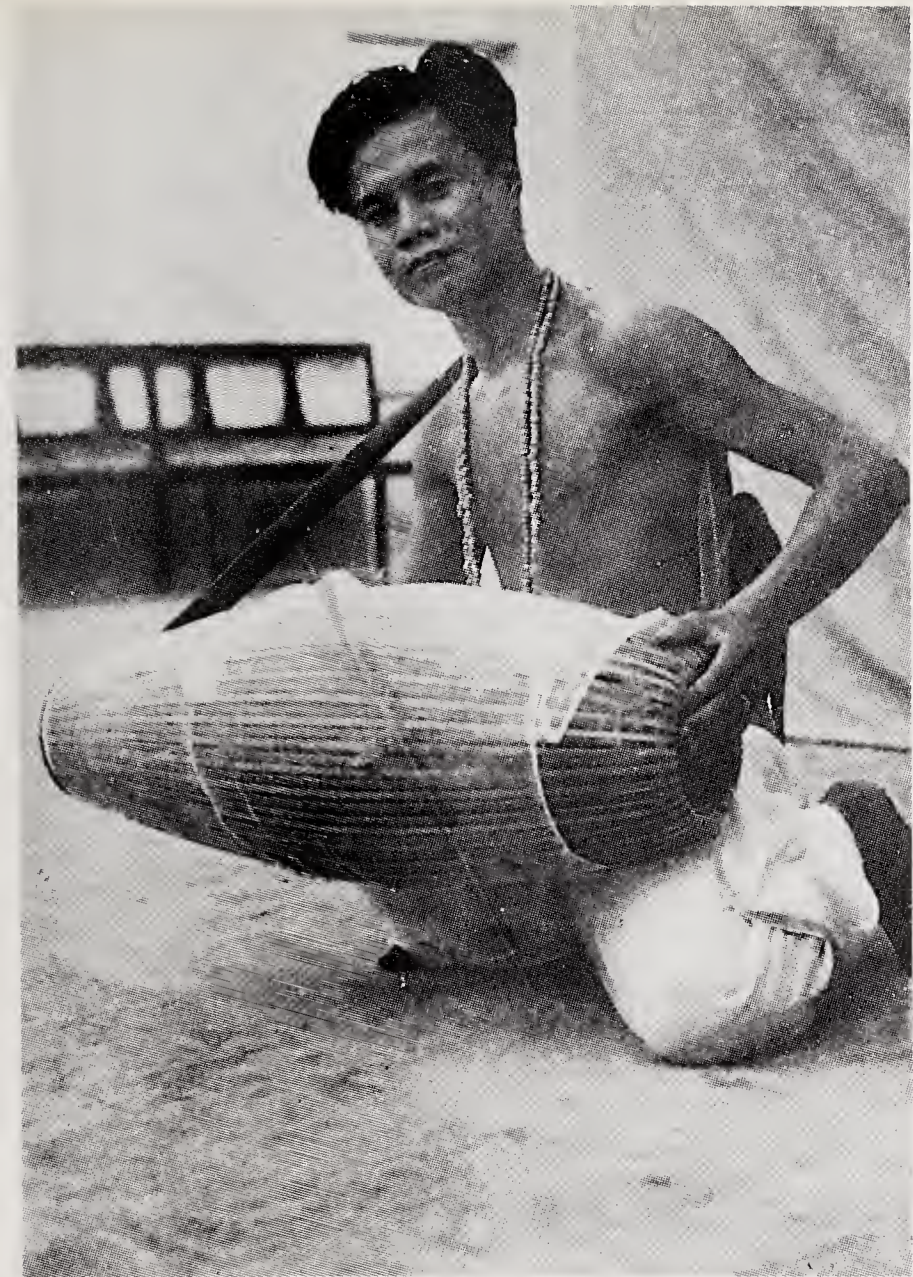
Pung cholan—*Babu Singh*





Pung cholam : a drum dance—Mahabir Singh

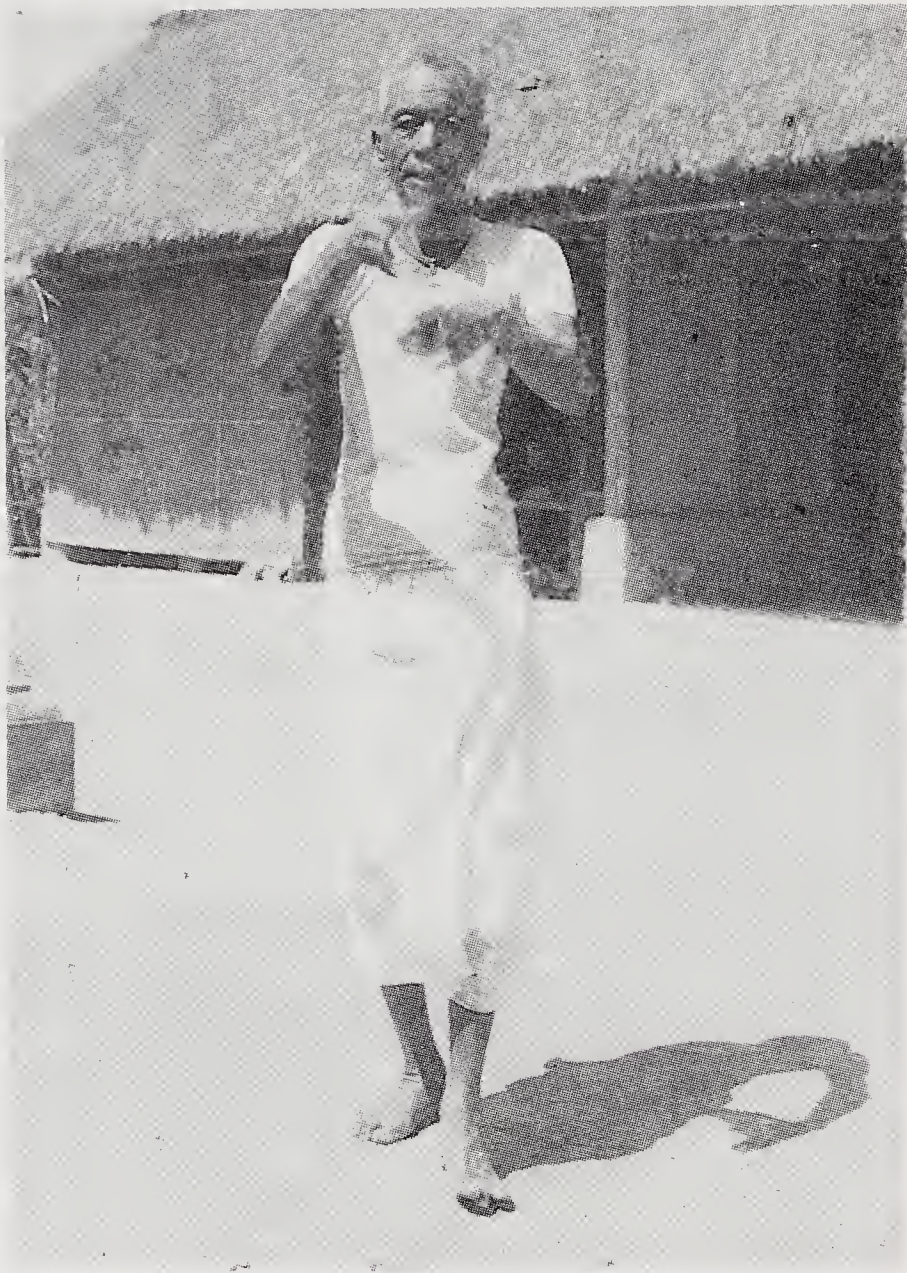




Pung cholam—*Mahabir Singh*



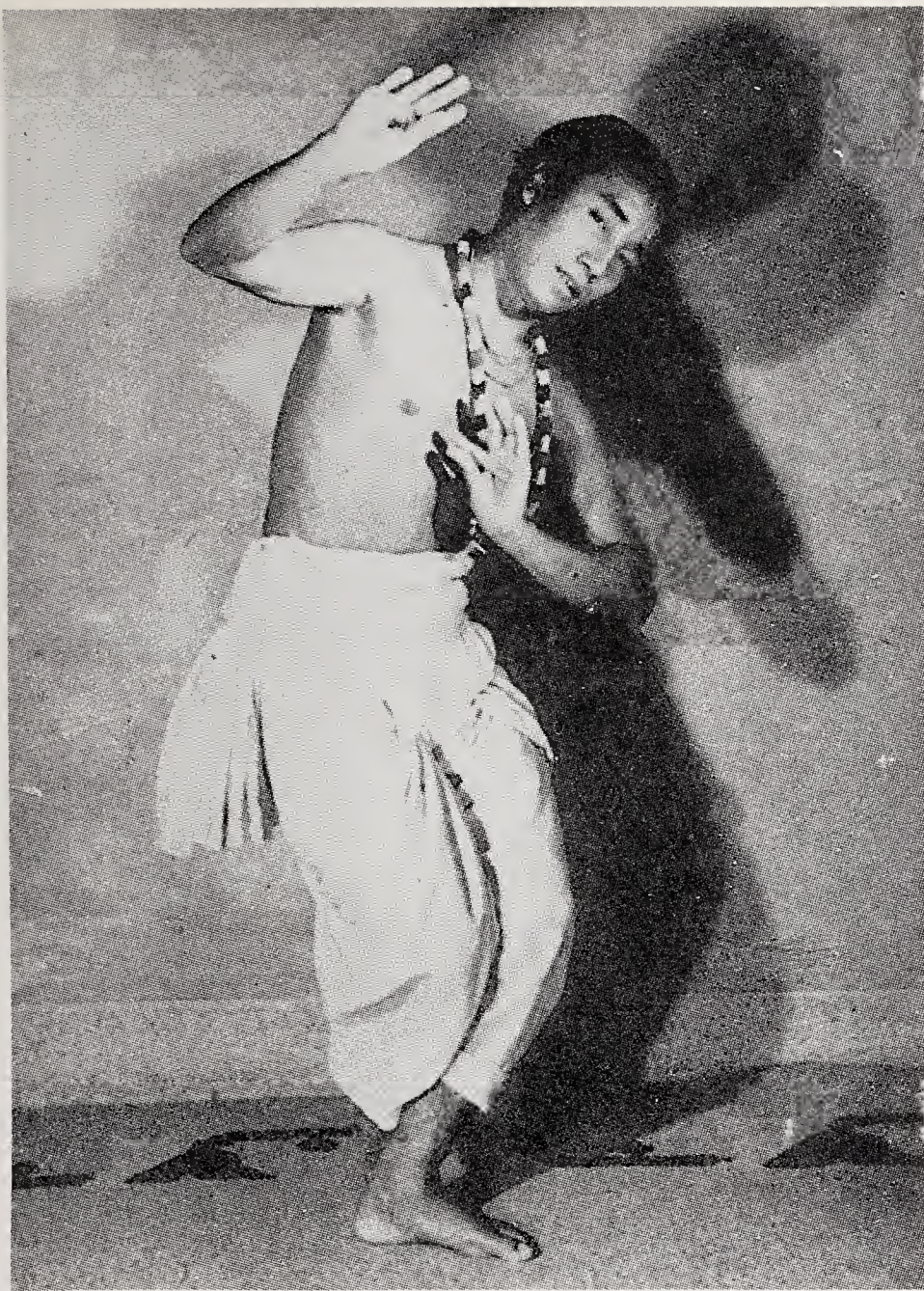




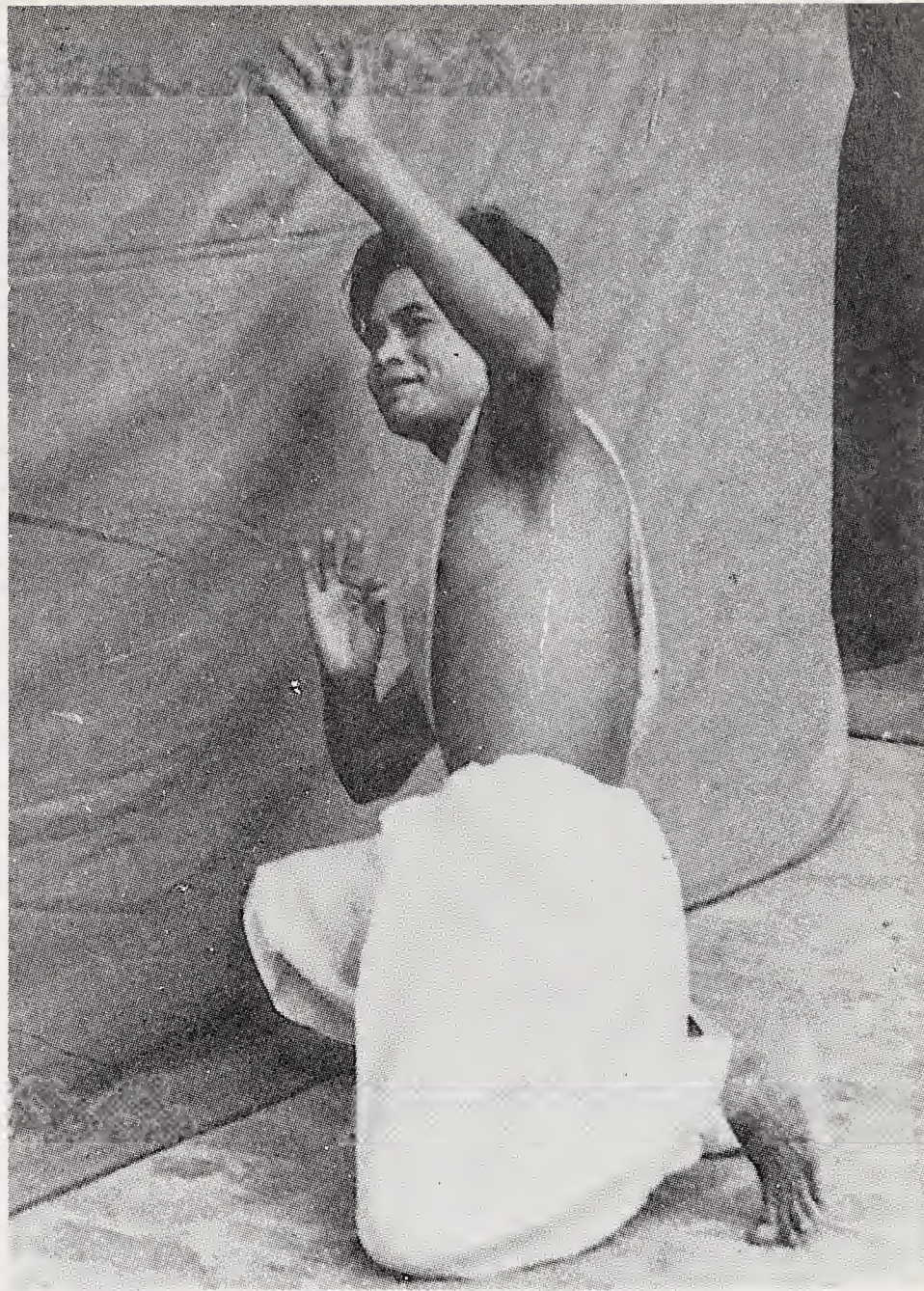
*Bhangi Sequences: Guru Amobi Singh*







*A nritya movement—Babu Singh*



*Sitting posture—Mahabir Singh*

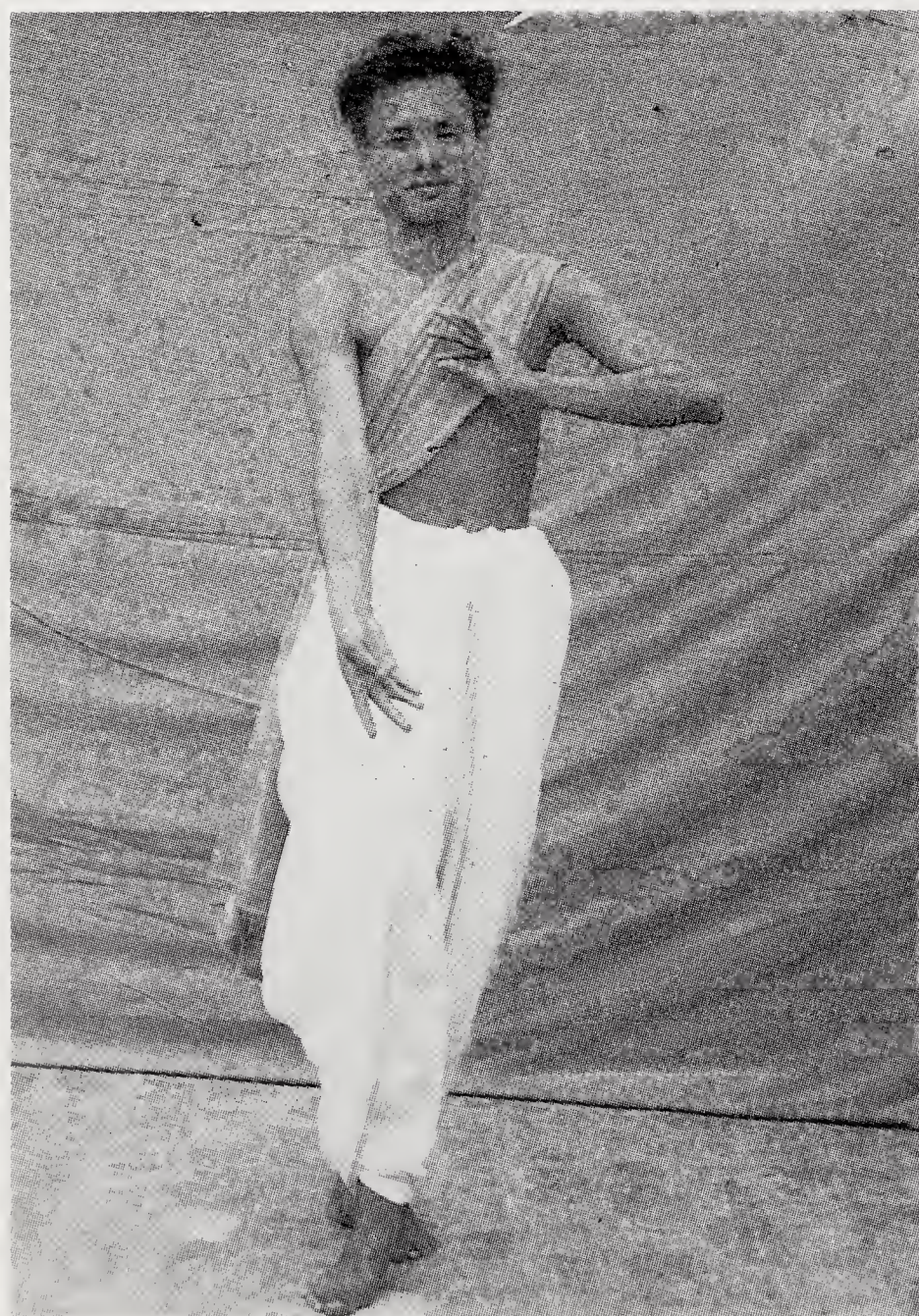


*Sitting posture—Babu Singh*





**Nritta** : *Mahabir Singh*



















**Kartali—Jhaveri sisters**



*Radha and Krishna—Suryamukhi and Tombino*





*Guru Amobi Singh with disciples*







*Singhjit Singh and group*



---

Kathak

---





THAKUR PRASAD MAHARAJ



BRINDA DIN MAHARAJ



KALKA DIN MAHARAJ





*After a painting of Acchan Maharaj*





*Birju Maharaj*



*Lacchu Maharaj*





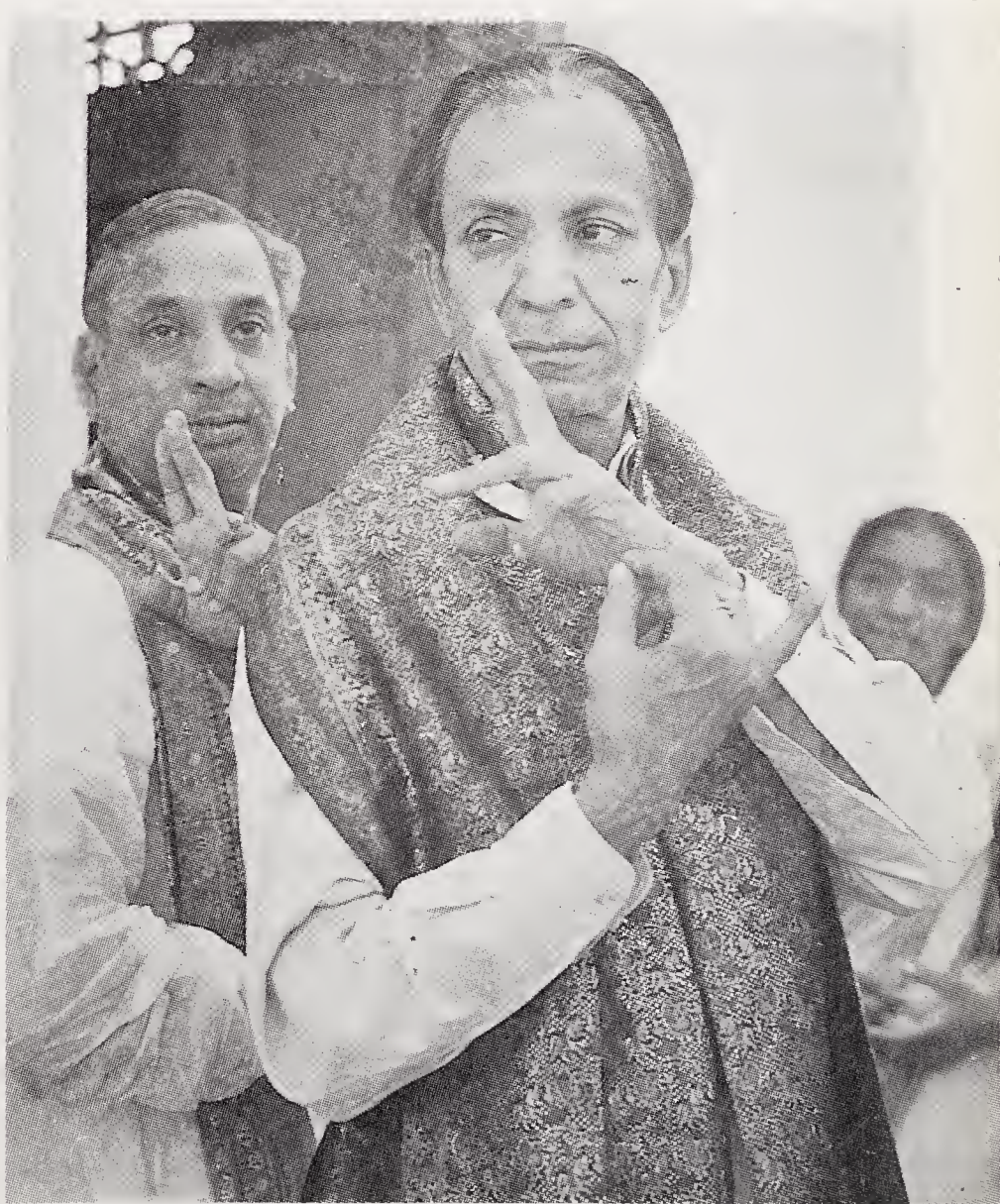
*Shambhu Maharaj*



*Achchan Maharaj*



*Lacchu Maharaj*







*Menaka*

*Tara Chowdhury*







*Sitara Devi*



*Damayanti Joshi*

*Sitara Devi*







*Damayanti Joshi*

*Roshan Kumari.*



*Damayanti Joshi*







*Birju Maharaj and  
Kumudini Lakhia*



*Gopi Krishna*









*Rani Karna*



*Rani Karna*





*Uma Sharma*



*Ladli*



*Uma Sharma*



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MINISTRY OF INFORMATION & BROADCASTING  
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

ISBN : 81-230-0589 — X

PRICE : R